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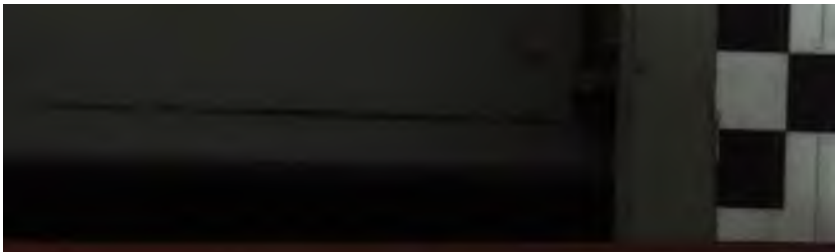
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"'You must let me keep this,' he insisted."

[PAGE 14.

# *The*
# SPLENDID CHANCE

BY

MARY HASTINGS BRADLEY

AUTHOR OF "THE PALACE OF DARKENED WINDOWS"
AND "THE FAVOR OF KINGS"



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# THE SPLENDID CHANCE

## BOOK I

### CHAPTER I

SHE knew, as he very high-handedly carried her away from the others who had come to the steamer to see her off, that it was going to be a wretched ten minutes! They had gone over that ground so often of late! She was aware—to her unhappiness—of every plea that he could make, of every stubborn, wounding word that she must give in reply. It did no good to talk about it any more, but since it was the last hour before her sailing she could not grudge him those few instants out of the lifetime that she was so persistently withholding.

To her unhappiness for him there was added a subtle sense of shame, because she *had* seen this coming and had been irresolute, uncertain, so genuinely liking him that she had been dreadfully tempted. . . .

Even now it was hard to be sure that she would never be sorry for this. There were so many ways of looking at life!

"I'll wait," he kept telling her with maddeningly

dogged insistence. "You don't know yourself, yet. You're crazy now over this painting thing—but what is there in that for you? You'll find out! And I'll wait——"

Across the gray-blue of her eyes there scudded a little zigzag of panic fear. Across the young eagerness of her face there darkened a shadow of age-old hesitation. It was so perilously easy to have him wait—with no ostensible responsibility upon her part! Suppose he were right? Suppose she failed? Suppose she never loved? Suppose she never met anyone else so likable—so distractingly eligible? Oh, she knew what lunacy her refusal of him would be thought! And she knew, too, for all her youth and buoyancy, that the game of life goes often hardest with the most scrupulous player. From the deeps a hundred whispers of caution rose, a prompting echo from long lines of sensible, home-loving women.

Then she shook her head at him angrily, her straight brows knit. "No! Don't wait, Dick. It's useless."

"But you like me?"

"Too well. That's the trouble. I can almost persuade myself that such liking is enough—but it's not. There's more I ought to feel, more I could feel, if—if——"

"If you met the right one?"

The discord in his voice smote her quivering senses hard. She was a girl with a fatal capacity for feeling others' pain—sometimes too late; a fatal weakness for giving pleasure—sometimes too long. Tears leaped to her eyes.

"Oh, Dick, I wish I could give you what you want! I wish I could!"

Quickly he told her, "Your liking is enough, Katherine. I wouldn't ask for more."

She knew better. There was an irony of wisdom in her shadowy smile. It was not enough, she told him. Neither for him—nor for her. She was so brimming with life, so conscious of vitality that would be waste with him, that her words came edged with unconscious revelation.

"I want to know all of it—all of life that there is to feel. There must be something more! And till it comes I want to be free, free—free for my work, free for my own life." Already, beneath her transient distress, her youth had taken on its look of eagerness.

He said bitterly, "You'd have married me if you hadn't won that prize."

They were stopping at the rail, on the upper deck, hidden by one of the lifeboats. For a moment more his gaze, belligerent yet entreating, rested on her flushed and spirited face as if for the first time he was reading the true meaning of it for him, then his eyes turned away from her in a blind stare across the harbor teeming with its plying craft. The March wind, vagrant and capricious, buffeted his set young face where desire and stiffening pride struggled behind locked lips. He opened them on a painful acknowledgment of defeat.

"Well, if I can't make you love me, Katherine, I can't, that's all."

She put an impulsive hand on his arm. "And some day you'll be glad! Some day when you meet *the* girl

with no paint stains on her fingers and with naturally curly hair! And you'll tell her that she is the only one you ever loved and that I was just a jolly old thing you grew up with!"

The cheer of this prophecy fell flat. The goaded young man grunted.

"A fat lot you know about it!"

Irrepressible humor bubbled into the compassion of the girl's eyes. She looked at his averted face with a half-rallying, half-roguish air of coaxing him to see how ill tragedy became him. He was a stalwart figure of young manhood, not tall, but very strongly built, with an impressive air of discriminating prosperity from the cut of his spring overcoat to the glint of the black opal in his exclusive scarf. Achievement had certainly been in his forefathers. His own face had been molded in lines of an acquiescent satisfaction with which the present denial was at war.

Hesitantly, the girl reminded him of the time. The others were waiting to see her. They would think it strange. . . . He turned and looked at her, seeing a vision that he was to carry as a memory for many a day, a vision of a girl, gray-eyed, fresh-cheeked, with yellow hair blowing in the wind.

He put a gripping hand upon her arm and drew her further back in the shelter of the lifeboat. "It's the last time we may ever see each other like this," he said huskily. "You say it's good-by—for always. Let me kiss you good-by, Katherine."

In touched affection the girl inclined her cheek, cool and rosy with the wind.

And then, whether he was making one last essay, intending a conquering assault upon her senses, or whether he was carried away by impulse, his arms closed tightly round her and his lips insistently sought hers. A pang went through her of confused incredibility, of distaste, of unhappiness for him. . . . And as she pressed him back she turned her flushing face away and encountered the brightly fascinated gaze of a young man just rounding the corner of their shelter.

She had a sudden, violent impression of the laughter in that young man's eyes. There was wicked mirth in the very set of his shoulders as he swung about and beat a forced retreat.

It was humiliating! The shame of intimacy intruded upon is never with the intruder but with the unlucky intruded-upon ones. A small boy beneath the balcony would have turned *Romeo* and *Juliet* to derision. A hotter color stung Katherine's cheek than Dick Conrad's unwelcome kiss had brought. If she had loved him—but not loving him her concern was for the silly figure that she was cutting in the unknown's eyes. Her anger flared—not against poor Dick for she *had* given her cheek at least—but against this intrusive young stranger who came popping about unlikely corners in such unforeseen fashion. Had he no one to whom he should be saying good-by? Did he think he would find his friends behind lifeboats? Or perhaps—hateful thought!—he was not there just to say good-by to someone. Perhaps he was a fellow-passenger!

He was indeed. He leaned near her at the rail some little time later, when she and the Whartons, her travel-





ing companions, fluttered their farewells at the figures upon shore that grew smaller and smaller till the faces mingled in a dwindling blur. She had a swift impression of the young man as very tall and thin, with a long ulster and a cap pulled far down over deep-set eyes, and then she saw him take a quick, whimsical look at herself, and as if delicately surmising that she might not care for the proximity of one who had surprised the tender intimacy of her adieu he moved considerately away. He seemed to be alone. . . .

She was glad when that young man moved away. She did not want to be made to remember those last moments with Dick Conrad—she was distressfully eager to be free of Dick Conrad and all his ways. It was dreadful to have hurt someone. In vain for her sense of character—older than her experience—to tell her that Dick Conrad was hardly the soil for deep-rooted tragedy. She remembered that queer, impotent look in his eyes. . . .

Was life to be forever like that? Could one never be oneself, free to grow and develop as one wished, without crushing out what someone else was wishing?

She wondered if she would be sorry, selfishly sorry for this, in the years to come? She was not so made but that the thought gave her a qualm! But she could not help her decision; she seemed forever secretly different from other people, set on some quest of her own. . . .

And then a reanimating gladness was lighted like a lamp in her—young relief that this worrying thing was over and done with, the decision made and the future was untrammeled and free. To her, the sailing of this

ship was adventure. It was adventure, romance—the eternal quest of youth. It was the first step to the unknown—the land of promise. Anything and everything might happen. The stirring of far-away things was in the air. Hazard was invoked; chance tempted. . . . Her pulses quickened with the quickening stir of excitement, and her face, young, eager, joyous, had the touchingly confident look of one who listens to the Winged Victories.

## CHAPTER II

BUT it was not so easy to be done with thoughts of Dick Conrad. There were his roses on the table in the dining salon. There was his fruit basket in the stateroom. There was his steamer letter. There were the Wharton sisters, old family friends, recurring to him with gentle insistence. Their fancy had been captured by the young man's hasty trip to New York to see her off, and his father's position shed undeniable glitter upon the romance.

In their separate ways both sisters made manifest to her their solicitude lest her youthful desire for a career should lead her to abandon the sphere of truest happiness. It came rather touchingly from them, Katherine thought. Ellen Wharton was one whom tragedy had scarred. On the eve of the wedding her lover had been killed. She was a very beautiful woman, with a clear-cut, black and white distinction, but she had never, Katherine had heard, "looked" at another man. Her statuesque whiteness gave her the suggestion, to the girl's fancy, of one from whom her heart's blood had literally been drained.

Anne Wharton, the younger, was not so distinctive

nor was her life so dignified by sorrow. She had known neither love nor loss. She was one of those charming women that the world wonders to find unmarried—forgetting what men are most prone to marry. Her exclusions, her fastidiousness, the shyness behind her social poise, and her fatal facility for generalizing a situation—she would have conventionalized an earthquake—had all been conspirators against her. From her, even more than from Miss Ellen, Katherine thought, it was eloquent to hear the gently spoken reminder that, after all, it was in her home that a woman found her most lasting happiness.

"But with the right one," said Katherine defiantly.

Anne Wharton hesitated. "Yes-s," she murmured into the depths of the steamer trunk which she was unpacking. Then she cast a faintly quizzical glance upon the girl. Her unspoken thought seemed to be pointing out that it was a trifle absurd for Katherine—daughter of a none-too-affluent professor—not to find the right one in Dick Conrad. "He seems to care so genuinely——"

"I know," said the girl hastily. "And his father's in Steel. And if I don't live to regret him I'll regret the Steel!" And to Miss Anne's air of deprecation of that shameless point of view she gave a droll little grin that had something indescribably boyish and gamin-like about it.

"Never mind, dear Miss Anne, it's the way I'm made. I expect it's the painting," she went on whimsically. "It means more to me than anything else in the world!"

"Yes, dear, now—but later?"





Always the cold hand of caution, the pointing finger of feminine foresight, Katherine thought rebelliously. Suppose life was a chance? It was a *splendid* chance! . . . Better never to have lived at all than to live coldly, safely, snugly, like herded sheep! . . .

"Later? Who knows? That's the charm of it. And I can't believe that I can ever be anything but happy!" The girl stood for a moment with bright cheeks and dreaming eyes, then whirled about on her companion with one of the sudden turns that revealed her swift, slim grace. "Don't let us bother over things in here any longer! Come out on deck again. The sea is glorious. It's just as I knew it would be!"

Anne Wharton felt a throb of half-wistful, half-pitying futility. The girl was so very young!

But there were other reminders of Dick Conrad not so easily diverted. The recollection of that unfortunate farewell was flashed at Katherine half a dozen times a day from the eyes of the young man who had surprised it.

Not that this young man—the second day out placed him as an Englishman, a Captain Edgerton—was so base as to let his recollection dance openly upon the surface, but the very pointedness of the repression, the guarded negation of all laughter when his gaze encountered hers, was evidence enough. She knew perfectly well that he remembered, that he was smiling at her in his thoughts, recalling the ardor of the scene, her crimson face . . .

And when he met her walking the deck with one or the other of the young men who sat at her table, or danc-

ing in the salon or chatting at late supper, she knew from the ironic flicker of the Englishman's glance and the twist of his lips that he was saying humorously, "Ah, well, you're certainly not pining—whatever you write *him!* You *are* a cool hand!"

She had just enough conversation with this Captain Edgerton, the second day out, to know how he would phrase it. He had been talking with some people in a group of which Katherine formed a part, a group that had gathered at the rail to watch the black fin of a following shark. When the group thinned the Englishman had sauntered over to where Katherine still stood, and, extending his field-glasses, made some casual remarks. His bright glance, clear and a little cool, had an air of deliberately not remembering that he had seen her before under any circumstances whatever.

Katherine had replied with a hauteur which had become ludicrous to remember. It had seemed to her—to whose social experience "introductions" were the breath of life, and who had been cautioned by an anxious mother concerning shipboard manners—it had seemed to her that this stranger was treating her with casual freedom. The memories that he evoked of Dick Conrad constrained her. She was absurdly anxious to make an impression of dignity.

He had not waited for the impression to expand. After a pair of monosyllables from her he had sauntered away, and thereafter, to her later chagrin, be it admitted, he had made no effort to develop the unpromising acquaintance, contenting himself with an occasional bow when unavoidable, and that carefully guarded glance

which bespoke his mirthful recollection of something droll to guard.

Increasingly Katherine had felt an utterly needless desire to put herself right in his eyes, to prove to him that she was not a young person of eternal stiffness and to paint out the memory of the sentimental creature he must be seeing in her. But one cannot walk up to an all-but-total stranger and say, "Let me tell you, I am *not* engaged to that young man! You beheld no Romeo-and-Juliet parting, but an act of charity, abused. Now, for goodness' sake, don't let me catch you twinkling at me any more!"

Yet aside from this faintly ruffling resentment of the Englishman's memories, the days were all gladness to her. They slipped past far too rapidly, like bright beads raining from a string. They were unforgettable days of wide seas and skies, days of spring sunshine and March winds, of keen, salt freshness, of tumultuous cloud and scudding shadows. All that loved beauty in her responded to the beauty about her. It seemed enough, then, just to be young and alive, with a heart for loveliness and laughter. Why could not life be like this always, bright and free and plastic, deeply conscious of its inexhaustible vitality?

## CHAPTER III

IT had rained at noon but later the sun came out, fugitive, faint-hearted, at first, then suddenly confident and conquering. The sea that had been foam-flecked and fretful became all bloom and glitter. The clouds looked luminous and joyful, sailing very high on their mysterious ways.

The exhilaration of the day was dancing in Katherine's blood. A smile of prankish daring edged her lips. Very stealthily she tore out a page of her sketchbook, hidden within a larger book as she sat, rug-wrapped, in the chair next Miss Anne's. Very stealthily she opened the fingers that lifted the loose sheet just as a tall figure, hands deep in the ulster pockets, peaked cap low over the eyes, came tramping by on the tenth or twentieth oblivious round.

The wind seized on the paper, fluttered it conspicuously, and obligingly flung it across the path of that tall, oncoming figure. And then, like all meddlesome assistants, it overdid matters. With an unnecessary puff it sent the paper twirling over the rail.

But the tall young man's hands came out of those deep pockets with amazing quickness. He made a swift

dash to the rail and reached high for that fluttering paper. In triumph his fingers closed on it.

Katherine sat up very straight in her chair, her eyes alight with mischief.

The young man turned to restore his capture and as he did so very naturally his fingers busied themselves absently smoothing out the creases he had inflicted, and very naturally his eyes rested upon the damage that his grip had wrought. And then he became aware of bold, black pencil strokes, of a long-legged, hurrying figure in a monumental ulster overhung with a bulldog pipe, an aquiline nose, and a peaked cap. The thing was capitally done. The young Englishman began to laugh, and a warm color, like a girl's, rose in his very clear-skinned face.

"I say—you must let me look at this," he declared to Katherine.

"It's too late—isn't it?—to say no," she gave back, in a soft note of laughter.

"You *are* clever—that is, if you are the artist?" he thought to question, and at her admissive nod, "Then you must let me keep this," he insisted, still smiling boyishly down at the crumpled sketch.

In the next chair Miss Anne bestirred herself.

"Why, Katherine, what is it?" And as the Englishman held up his trophy the lady's face was touched with her sympathetic sense of what poor Katherine must be feeling at this incident. "Ah, you mustn't mind that pencil of hers, Captain Edgerton!" she said pacifically. "She caricatures us all wickedly—but she isn't always

so terribly found out!" And Katherine had the grace to blush.

"But this is very jolly," the Captain maintained. "It's clever, you know." He looked at Katherine as though she might need reassurance upon that point.

"At least you recognize it," she returned gaily. "That is more than some portrait painters can claim, isn't it?"

"Recognize it? Rather! . . . Do sign it for me. I'd like to keep it, please."

Obligingly she printed a neat "Katherine King" in a corner of the sketch, and then, after a little three-cornered chat, when Miss Anne began to find it too cold for comfort in her rug and decided to go within, Captain Edgerton turned to the girl with a boyish air of yielding to impulse.

"Won't you take a turn with me, Miss King? It's not cold when you're stirring."

She felt a little shy when she started off beside him. And the eternal reminder of Dick Conrad was at hand to embarrass her. Very quickly she began to talk.

"I should think more people would be out on deck. It's such a wonderful afternoon."

"But there's auction," he reminded her humorously, his hands deep in his ulster pockets again, his head bent before the wind that assailed them as they rounded the bow. "You forget that auction doesn't attend to changes in the weather."

"You don't play?"

"Not on shipboard. . . . If one confesses to it

once, one is lost. There is always a fourth to be found for some dull table."

Katherine laughed. "You *are* far-sighted! I rather wish I had been."

"I've observed you being occasionally victimized."

"But not often. And I should be adamant to any appeal on such a day!"

"Ah, it's your first trip, isn't it?" He looked round at her with a friendly smile.

She nodded. "It is. But I think I shall feel the same on my tenth. . . . You've crossed often?"

"Not the Atlantic. This is only the second trip on that."

"Your first trip then to America," she said. "Were you there long?"

"A week."

"A *week!*" She laughed. "What was the matter? Didn't you like us?"

"Immensely," he assured her. "But I didn't want to forfeit my leave. I was just over for my chum's wedding."

"To an American?"

"Yes, a New York girl. He met her last winter, on the Mediterranean. One of those shipboard affairs."

"Oh!" said Katherine a little blankly. He spoke as if "shipboard affairs" were negligible and fantastic trifles barbed by chance and propinquity. She thought, a bit resentfully, that he was young for such a tone.

"But what did you see of America in a week?" she questioned. "Were you in New York?"

"Only overnight—coming and going. The girl's peo-

ple had a place up the Hudson—a very jolly place. There were hills that looked splendid. I wish I'd had more of a chance at them."

"You should have stayed. And then you laugh at us for 'doing' Europe in so little time."

"Ah, but I don't claim to have 'done' America, you know!" He looked down on her smilingly. "I suppose you are going to see all the sights? Castles, capitals, cathedrals?"

"I'm going to Paris—to study."

"To study—what?"

"Painting," she said a little self-consciously—her aim was so great and she always felt somehow so femininely inadequate to it in people's eyes.

"Painting! . . . Ah, the sketchbook explained! You're the real thing, then," he said lightly, but there was frank astonishment in his eyes. She looked absurdly young in the straight, loose coat she wore. Her cheeks were poppy pink in the salt wind; her eyes were shining with their innocent air of happiness. Below her traveling cap a wave of honey-colored hair was visible. . . . It seemed to the young man that the study of painting was a totally inadequate occupation for such a feminine young person.

It seemed to the girl that he was feeling that she was a totally inadequate-looking person for the study of painting, and her answer was a meek murmur. "I do hope I am."

"But that's a large order," he said, quite seriously. "That is, if you're really going in for it."

"I am. I mean to find out if it's actually in me—or

just a flash in the pan. You've no idea how furiously I shall work! And I've a year to do it in."

"A year!" A sudden flicker of mischief twinkled in his eyes. He gave her a droll, boyish look.

"I say, that's a long time for *him*, isn't it?"

"For——?"

No use to evade the audacity of those eyes! "We can't pretend, can we," their teasing look seemed to be saying, "that I didn't see you—and that you didn't see that I saw——?"

She said lightly, trying for coolness, "That's a very wrong assumption of yours."

"Oh, come now, Miss King, don't be a humbug! Don't tell me that it was your brother!"

She laughed at that, her cheeks flushing in the quickness of her young blood, her eyes for just one instant meeting the chaffing boyishness of his. "No brother, but —I was only being a sister to him."

"Ah, now—now——?"

"It was good-by—to what never was," she heard herself most strangely insisting.

The astonishing young Captain replaced his incredulity with large surprise. "Letting the chap down—what? Not taking him on? Is that the way," he inquired with an air of solicitude, "that you usually—er—let them down? Because if it is——"

She refused to meet his merriment.

"I say, there's three more days before we land. If I could work up a little sympathy for myself——"

"You're too absurd!" Her laughter bubbled. Her eyes were full of sudden lights. The audacity of hers

danced in tune in his. Poor Dick Conrad's passionate farewell was serving in unremembered irony to bridge these two to sudden intimacy.

"You're not a bit what I expected," she ran on merrily. "I thought Englishmen were more—polite—and not at all humorous."

"Ha, the funny paper chap! Lord Dundreary who daren't go to the music halls Saturday night for fear he'll laugh in church on Sunday! . . . But you don't mean that I'm the first Englishman you ever met?"

He revealed, in all unconsciousness, his sense of the immense lack of such an existence.

Her smile was teasing. "The first ordinary one."

"I like that! As if I weren't a most extraordinary——"

"But the others were lions—writing lions and painting lions, caged and exhibited at receptions. And they were—solemn."

"I should hope so! Fancy being exhibited at a pink tea!" The young Captain grimaced. "And I suppose you made heartless fun of their captivity?"

"No, I usually poked cakes and ices at them through the bars of the cage. You see father is a professor in a small college and so the social duties fall heavily upon all the family."

"I begin to grieve that I am not a lion. Then I might have been handed on to your college and you would have exhibited me and fed me ices. And done my portrait—a very *respectful* portrait!" the young man emphasized, and again their eyes met and their youth

laughed in that sudden, light-hearted sense of intimacy.

"Do you mind if I smoke?" he inquired, and at her quick, "Not a bit," he stopped to fill and light his pipe in the shelter of a companionway. It took several minutes for the wind was high, but the young man was not impatient. He had an air of attending thoroughly to whatever might be the business of the moment, and Katherine, taking fresh note of his lean, clear-cut face and tall, rather spare figure, found herself intensely liking his look of high-bred race and nervous energy. He had laughing eyes and a fighting chin. The eyes were brightly blue, deep-set under arched brows; the nose was purely aquiline; the chin would have been too dominant but for the boyish sweetness of his mouth when he smiled. . . . And he smiled when he looked up from his pipe and surprised the serious fixity of her gray eyes on him.

Without speaking they turned away from the companionway and fell into step together, then paused involuntarily at the stern of the boat to look down into the churning froth of waters and out across the blue and gold sparkle of the waves. It seemed to Katherine that there had never been so gay a day. She felt a sense of holiday in her heart, a feeling of gladness and content, that yet held its undercurrents of vague agitation.

Captain Edgerton broke the lengthening silence. His tone was quite serious now; so were the blue eyes that were looking steadily down at her.

"Tell me about the painting, please," he asked. "I am interested."

The last crimson glow of the sunset which had blazed like a burning Rome had faded from the west and only light strands of purest, palest colors were fluttering there like far banners on some height when Katherine, wind-blown and breathless, came flying into the state-room to dress for dinner.

She found Miss Ellen, freshly gowned, sitting on the couch, a spread towel on her silken knees, doing a few last things to her polished nails, while Miss Anne was hooking in place the girdle of her sedate dinner dress.

"I *am* late—we didn't realize—" she murmured, hastily flinging off her coat and hat, and attacking blouse buttons with cold and rather fumbly fingers.

"Who is 'we'?" inquired Miss Ellen, and at the girl's, "Oh—Captain Edgerton and I," Miss Anne looked up quickly.

"Not all this time with Captain Edgerton?" she exclaimed, and then, curbing a natural astonishment to a milder pace, "Why, what did you two find to talk about so long?"

"Oh—everything." The girl's eyes had little dancing points of light in them, belying her vagueness. "Paris—London—Oxford—the barracks—painting," she recited. The mirror gave her a sudden shock. "So I look like *that?*" she exclaimed tragically. "All red—and blowsy."

"How did you think you looked in this wind?" murmured Miss Anne.

"I was feeling beautiful," said Katherine whimsically, lowering the wash-stand. "His name is Jeffrey St. Preux Edgerton," she informed them, while busily wash-

ing. "His grandmother was French. Her husband was an ambassador. And all his other grandfathers were soldiers. His father was killed in the Boer War, and his mother lives in the country at Edgerton Hall. Doesn't that sound English—and romantic? There are just the two sons—the Captain and a little brother now at Eton. He's going to the navy when he's big enough, he says, but the Captain wants him in the army."

"What an autobiographical young man," was Miss Ellen's comment.

Katherine stared above the folds of her active towel. "Oh, no," she smiled back. "He didn't recite it like that. It just came out—when we were talking. You see I'd been telling him about my home, and my brothers, and—and painting—and so it all came out."

"You must have missed your tea," said Miss Anne after a moment, during which Katherine attacked her flying hair with a vigorous brush. "I went on deck to look for you but I didn't see you and I thought you were inside somewhere writing letters."

"We must have been on the upper deck, then," Katherine reflected. She wavered, her hands full of her light, shining hair, between a part and a low knot or a pompadour and a high one, deciding hastily in favor of the pompadour. "But we didn't miss our tea. Captain Edgerton went down and brought some, and we had it up there in the sunshine. Weren't the ginger cookies good to-day, though?"

No one made any answer to that, and she completed her hairdressing in absorbed silence, then drew out the steamer trunk and began diving into it for a dress which

she had not yet worn. Behind her back the sisters' eyes met.

"He's a very attractive young man, that Captain Edgerton," said Miss Ellen evenly, after an instant. "He comes from a very fine old family, I believe—some of the passengers were telling me about him only this morning. It is very interesting to meet a young man like that, so typical of a class foreign to us, full of caste prejudices, of course, and immense exclusions, but all the more interesting, on that account, to such casual acquaintances as we travelers are."

Not a word of this did Katherine comprehend. Her silence was not preoccupation with this "No Trespassing" sign which Miss Ellen's caution was so swiftly hanging out for her impulsive youth. She was wondering, sitting back on her heels before the open trunk, whether, after all, the corn color would not look a *teenty* bit *too* sudden . . .

And that night, meeting Captain Edgerton's eyes after dinner, she was not in the least reminded of Dick Conrad.

## CHAPTER IV

SHE was not an early riser but the next morning she suddenly found herself intensely awake in her upper berth, her eyes fixed on the circle of blue, bright sky the port-hole framed. And presently the call of it became imperative, so that she slipped softly down and dressed in stealthy haste. But the terrible intimacy of the stateroom defied precaution, and the two sleepers roused to a sense of something extraordinary going on that the bald simplicity of her explanation did not allay.

When the girl had gone, whisking lightly out the stateroom with an air of elate escape, the sisters stared solemnly at one another from lower berth to couch.

"Do you think—?" said Miss Ellen.

Remembering the yesterday afternoon, remembering the corn-colored dinner dress, remembering the chat over the coffee in the salon and the later walk on deck, they appeared amply justified in thinking. And when, a long hour and a half later, Katherine entered the salon for breakfast with the young Englishman in her wake, there was not the slightest doubt of disingenuous collusion. But there the good ladies were wrong.

For Katherine had not the least reason to expect that Jeffrey Edgerton would be striding briskly along the sunshiny deck that morning. She had no notion at all of his inveterately early habits. Simply the day was calling to her and something in her was answering. She strolled about, her hands boyishly deep in her pockets, her uncovered hair blowing back from her face, offering a spectacle of delightful girlhood to the few spectators yet abroad—mainly engaged in swabbing the decks she so lightly trod and rubbing endlessly the shining brasses.

When a tall and curiously familiar figure came quickly around the bow toward her, her heart gave a queer little jump and then went on a little faster than ordinary. She was conscious of no surprise but of a freshened sense of pleasure, only a little troubled and shy for fear he should think she had been expecting him. But his own gladness in the encounter was too frank and simple for such undercurrents.

Together they elected to make their way out to the bow, forbidden to cabin passengers in general, and there huddling down against the coils of rope, the ship at their backs, the sea in their faces, with white foam flying past, they knew that wonderful sensation of joyous, lonely flight across the waters that no safe deck can give. They could feel themselves out before the mast of some flying galleon, plunging across an uncharted sea. . . .

And to her, after that, those shipboard hours which had seemed so amply sufficing in their changing loveliness, became nothing but the background for the sud-

den play of this young attraction. She did not in the least reason about it, she did not plan nor hesitate. She gave herself, as simply as a child, to the pleasure of being with him, of having him in their group, of seeing him near them, knowing that he wanted to be with her. It was very stirring, very exciting, and left her sometimes a little breathless with a curiously hurrying heart.

To the one remonstrance which Miss Ellen thought it worth while quietly to give she had replied, her gray eyes childlike, her lips candidly smiling, "But Miss Ellen, dear, I *like* Captain Edgerton," and appeared to think that settled it.

So might Dido have declared that she *liked* Æneas upon that warrior's arrival, and Helen may undoubtedly have remarked to Menelaus in outward simplicity that she *liked* Paris! Miss Ellen's dry "Evidently," was significant of hidden depths.

But there were no conscious reserves behind Katherine's simplicity. For the first time in her life she had been overtaken by a feeling which stirred her into a self she did not know, and beyond whose daily revelations she did not attempt to analyze. Perhaps it was all part of the spring wonder of the trip. . . . Perhaps it was just a mood of spring, sparkling, evanescent. . . . Perhaps—like the spring—it was a beautiful beginning.

But from that veil her fancy drew back shyly, even with sharp distaste. The present was enough. Real work was waiting in Paris.

There were three days of it, three days of flashing, quicksilver hours, and then through fog-drenched air, heavy and blankly veiling as gauze curtains, Katherine saw the shores of France take on a nearer and surer outline. She saw the city of Boulogne looming shadowy ahead, with its roofs and chimneys gaining in individual distinctness against the dun sky, and before it in the vague harbor waters separate ships detached themselves with detail of spars and sail and misty cordage. Soon she saw the little fleet of fishing-vessels stranded by low tide upon the shores, and the puffing tender making ready to come out.

Her first view of France—and there was no uplift, nor stirring rush of expectation as she stared at the country her heart had so long strained to reach! Her mood was as flat and uninspired as the view. What was to be for her there was hidden behind that wan curtain and she was conscious now only of indefinable heaviness that was not far from depression.

It was absurd, but—perhaps one always felt so at the journey's end.

They would land now in an hour. Jeffrey Edgerton was to go on with the boat to Southampton.

All day the rain shut them in to publicity. The salons seemed crowded; the lower decks, canvas-curtained for protection, held an incessant throng. Everywhere the acquaintances to whom she had been so pleasant had surrounded her; everywhere addresses and friendly wishes and farewells were thrust upon her. Everywhere but from Jeffrey Edgerton. Not a parting word had he said. Only his eyes, extraordinarily serious, had fol-

lowed her in an oddly puzzled way, as if he, too, were wondering. . . .

And now that the rain had stopped and let them come to the upper deck alone they were standing at the rail, still wet with drops which the heavy air refused to take back, standing in utter silence, staring solemnly at the slowly nearing land. And suddenly it came over her as an instance of the ironic coincidence, the startling unexpectedness of life, that here where she had begun the trip with a farewell to one young man she was ending it with a farewell to another—and one who four days before had been an utter stranger. . . . But what a difference in her mood. . . . And she thought of that final parting with Dick Conrad, that utter putting behind her of the temptation to dally, to be safe, to invest the future, with a sense of almost frightened thanksgiving. Suppose, now, that she were fettered by some obligation! Suppose these last few days had never been!

Captain Edgerton had drawn a square of folded paper from his pocket. With a solemnity that gave him an endearing likeness to a small boy resolutely ignoring his self-consciousness at what he felt was a momentous thing, he told her that it was his address and asked for her own.

Hers, she said, was the American Express Company. They were not sure yet at what hotel they would stop.

"But later, when you leave the Whartons and take your studio, you'll send me that address?"

"Why, yes, if you wish."

"I do wish—very much." He gazed down at her a

little wistfully and worriedly. "I don't like to think of you alone in Paris," he brought out surprisingly. "Alone in a studio—with no one to look after you. It's —absurd."

"But why?" A very feminine smile quivered about her lips. "There are hundreds of American girls doing that very thing."

"But they're not *you*." Remorselessly his tone disposed of these unknown hundreds, lumping them in a safe and untroubling aggregation. He continued to stare anxiously down at her through the soft dusk. "Suppose you were ill?"

In sheer light-heartedness she felt a sudden inclination to laugh. Her depression, her dullness, had vanished magically like mist before some sudden warmth.

"But I shan't be! I never am! And anyway there are certain to be people in Paris that I know—at the studios or at the hotels. Be sure," she declared, "that I went over *that* with mother!"

Still his earnest look dwelt on her and she felt that there was something more that he intended saying, something he did not quite know how to say. She found herself waiting for it with a queer expectation and half dread.

And then he asked if he might come and see her.

The secret tension was lightened. She felt a sense of relief and gladness. "Why, yes, of course—if you're in Paris."

"But that's just it. I shan't be in Paris—not as a casual thing, you know." He spoke half humorously, but with an implication of frank avowal. "I want most

awfully to see you again. I can't bear to think of my *not* doing so. . . . I can't get away till my leave in August and that's too far away—except for a possible week-end or two. . . . And if I come for a week-end I want to know if you will really let me see you—give me all the time you can, you know?"

With an ungloved finger she drew a long line through the drops on the rail. "What a forehanded person!" she murmured—possibly to the rail for she did not look up. "Does he leave nothing to chance?"

"He's going to leave a good deal to it!" the young man laughed. "But he wants to know if you would be glad to see him again?"

Carefully she demolished five bright drops. "It would be sad;" she confided then, "to express my anticipatory delight—and have you forget to come. Paris is some way from London—and our friendship is but four days' old."

"But I've seen more of you in these four days than ever I have of any—almost any other girl I ever knew," he answered quickly, and Katherine's mind dwelt with useless curiosity upon that "almost."

"Don't you believe," he earnestly demanded, "that in four days I can come to feel that I really know you——"

"Oh, yes indeed," she assured him. "I've been unusually lovely these four days—it would be a stout heart that could resist me! But I wonder if I could have stood the test of five?"

He chuckled and then returned with humorous violence, "How I hate myself for that time I lost at the be-

ginning! I've court-martialed myself for gross incompetence and neglect of opportunity. I wanted to know you all the time. But, you see, I thought——"

She knew quite well what he had thought! Here, upon this very deck, with wicked laughter in his eyes, he had surprised her in Dick Conrad's arms! The darkness hid her heightening color.

Not wholly naïvely, "But did that matter?" she murmured, her finger again intent upon its traceries. "Couldn't you be friends with me even if you *did* think——"

"Humbug!" said Captain Edgerton rudely. "Now if *you* had seen *me* kissing some delightful girl goodby——"

A distant shock went through her. That "almost" recurred startlingly, and she began to wonder, rapidly and helplessly, about the delightful girls in his unknown life. And there must have been bridesmaids, yards of visiony bridesmaids at the Hudson estate wedding. . . . A small scare began to spread like a chilly cloud upon her spirit.

"Did you?" she murmured pensively.

"Humbug again," said the Captain. "You know I wouldn't be here if I had."

"There is nothing," she delicately pointed out, the corners of her mouth tilting in a shadowy smile, "so fatally compromising about being *here*——!"

It struck her that there was a peculiar, almost an ominous quality in that silence. Glancing hastily up over her shoulder she found the young man looking down. He had not stirred but through the dusk his eyes

met hers with a little flash of dancing lights. . . .

In the pause a distinct, tingling, electrical disturbance made itself felt.

"Not *yet*—but if you continue to look like *that!*" He laughed, but his voice had a sudden treacherous drop in it. Then very quickly he reverted to the serious. Night was closing in upon them and last minutes were pressing hard.

"You haven't answered me yet," he said. "Tell me truly—will you really be glad to see me in Paris? Do you want me to come?"

It was youth, with the insistent honesty of its desires. It was life, on the eternal quest. *Do you want me? Do I want you?*

She looked away from him across the darkening harbor, her eyes seeking dim distances. . . . Strange, that on this very boat, in the act of what she had thought an escape from the perplexing tangle of cross purposes she had plunged even deeper than ever into fresh stirrings and uncertainties. She was accustomed to beginnings—all her youth, as yet, was but tentative and promise and undertaking,—but the suddenness of *this* beginning, its utter disconnection with the rest of her life, gave it a sensation of almost ephemeral unreality.

She was silent so long, her eyes remote, that it seemed to him that his answer had been given, and he straightened under it in compliance with a nature which met rebuff bravely.

"Of course, if you would rather I didn't come," he said quietly, "if there is someone else so much a better friend than I can ever be——"

"Oh, no! There isn't!" The words came springing without her volition. She turned to him, her face lifted, her gray eyes luminous under the shadowing lashes.

"I'd *like* you to come," she uttered with a frankness that was a little breathless in its belated haste. "Only—only I was just wondering, Captain Edgerton, if you were real! You've been so sudden—you may be just a —a mirage."

He laughed happily, in the relief of her words. "A jolly substantial one," he declared. "But I know what you mean. I feel," he avowed, "a little bit that way about you. . . . Four days ago there was a distant young lady with yellow hair . . . talking with the other chaps. And now there's *you*. And everything's quite different. Isn't it?"

Her eyes acknowledged it, half laughing, half shy.

"And I'll come as soon as I can pull it off," he went on. "It may be a bit hard to get away for a time—but it will come right, you'll see. We'll manage it somehow."

It was the most unconscious thing in the world—that plural. It came slipping out of his exhilaration, his young faith in her sincerity. . . . It sent a sudden, sweet, stinging confusion through her, a glad, disturbing warmth.

And as they stood there, one lingering moment more, the damp salt air in their faces, the low clouds overhead, she realized, with a queer little flutter of her adventurous heart, that a scrap of paper, tossed lightly across the path of chance, may lead to solemn consequences.

## CHAPTER V

A LITTLE after noon the doors of the Académie Moderne closed behind her and she came out into the sunshine of the Rue de Notre Dame des Champs. It was April, sweet, warm and bright, with not a cloud from the morning's rain to dim the blueness of the sky. The tender breath of spring came stealing to her in the fragrance of violets from a curb vender's cart, and she stopped impulsively for a damp cluster of the purple flowers.

"Always the flowers," jeered Olga Goulebeff beside her. She was a short, plump girl, orphan daughter of a Russian father and a French mother, whose easel was next to Katherine King's in the morning classes. She had merry eyes, an impudent nose, a small, droll mouth and black, curly hair that grew low over her forehead and ears. At first glance she seemed a pleasant, rather childlike creature; it was not till you looked close that you glimpsed something fixed, secretive, inscrutable about these small features.

Katherine smiled vaguely in response. Her eyes were absently following the purple and gold masses of the flower cart as it bumped its way through the crowded

street; in her ears Olga's voice and the competitive cries of the venders were caught up and blent in the chimes that near them rang the quarter hour. She loved all the tones in that unquiet voice of Paris, all the colors in the bright and shifting spectacle. Everywhere she saw pictures. . . .

Following a little group of students the two girls turned into a small restaurant farther down the street and took their places at the end of one of the red-clothed tables. Already the scene had grown familiar to Katherine and she nodded to acquaintances here and there at the tables. There were a few girls and more older women present, but the majority were men, earnest-faced, bearded students, at present intent on the business of consuming an excellent luncheon for an insignificant price. Most of them were untidy in their clothes, many of them were shabby, in a picturesque, comfortable way, but the velveteen coat and the flamboyant tie and hair of the artist tradition of the quarter were nowhere represented except by two old derelicts of painters sipping their *vin ordinaire*.

At her own table a stream of rapid nonsense and parody was coming from a young man at the opposite end, Etienne de Trézac. De Trézac was the spoiled darling of the Académie. The students acclaimed him a genius. Guerin, the master, believed ardently in his power, and thundered, "Dilettante," bitterly at his indolence. "Mediocrity is always industrious," the young man would retort, with his mocking smile.

Between him and the other young Frenchmen at the school, good, earnest, provincial young fellows for the

most part, there lay a subtle difference invoked by every aspect of De Trézac's finished young person and grace of manner. He was not, like these others, bending his neck to the eternal yoke of Art; he was but lending some years of his youth until certain expectations of inheritance drew him back into that Faubourg where the obligations of Family reigned supreme. He was not rich; the small allowance on which he subsisted in alternate recklessness and saving care was an unwilling one from a family which felt that to produce instead of to patronize art was unworthy of the blood.

The impressionability of Katherine's youth had found romantic glamour in this story which De Trézac's charm enhanced. She was trying now to follow his rapid flow of French with its baffling elisions and its studio slang, but she gave it up and turned to Olga in rueful admiration.

"If I could only understand half that you do!"

Olga shrugged. "But why should I not? My mother was French. It is as native to me as Russian."

"Yes, but the English as well—and the German. And I heard you getting on famously with that Italian the other afternoon."

"Our gift for languages is a national necessity. No one can speak our own tongue and since we are a people who must talk we must learn the tongues of others," the girl laughed, finishing the last vegetable in the soup. "Woof—I was famished. That woman this morning—did you ever see such a pose? I worked like ten demons and then there was nothing right."

"Are you going back this afternoon?"

"I don't know. No." She drew a long breath of Katherine's violets, her little nose wrinkling in luxurious delight. "It is too warm. It is enervating. I should like to go to the country, I think. And you? You work, I suppose?"

Katherine shook her head. "No, I've some friends coming in to say good-by."

"And the *croquis*?"

"I shan't get back for that, either."

Olga glanced down the table, caught Etienne de Trézac's eye an instant, hesitated, then turned to Katherine with an air of spontaneous inspiration.

"But later? Shall we dine together? Let us go to the Lilas and look on. All the quarter will take the air to-night."

"I'd love to," Katherine easily agreed. She found Olga a bright and amusing companion whose three years at the art schools had given a patter of information and gossip to her tongue's end.

She went on with her lunch and did not see the little Russian's steady nod to Etienne, nor his quiet signal of intelligence. If she had noticed she would have thought it all a drolly foreign precaution for an apparently casual meeting. To her American mind such subtleties were absurd between frank and friendly companions in art.

Leaving Olga at the restaurant she started for the studio which had become home to her now, passing down the Rue de Varin for that detour through the Luxembourg Gardens which was a constant joy to her beauty-loving spirit. Here April was at her fairest and sweet-

est; the trees and shrubs were in delicate leaf; the grass held that first tender green of spring; the borders shone with golden-hearted daffodils. From the green shrubberies white statues gleamed and in the sunshine the drops of the fountain sparkled in rainbow hues.

Everywhere against the bloom and color of the park were bonnes and babies and a troop of little children; huge, bright hoops went flying down the paths with active little bare legs racing after; balloons were bobbing and floating at mimic heights like a sudden high growth of giant flowers and here and there delicious little girls in miniature skirts and droll little boys in very tight and short trousers above their thin legs were tossing balls or playing at diabolo.

The girl's lips curved in unconscious smiles at the youngsters, and she shared her violets with one toddler that swayed perilously about her skirts, then, remembering the flying minutes, she hurried on out of the park and through the crooked streets to that gray-stoned old corner where she lived.

She entered a worn doorway over which a battered coat of arms still bore its lilies, passed the door of the corner studio which was beneath her own and turned to the stairs. On the lowest step she found a small child sitting, who shrank patiently into the corner to let her pass. A round shade hat and a mop of untidy black curls half hid the little face, but from the shadows a pair of big, black eyes met Katherine's interrogative smile without a flicker of answering brightness.

"Do you want to see anyone?" said Katherine in French, for Madame Bonnet, the concièrge, was not at

present in her cage, and the mite looked forlorn there on her shadowy step.

The child continued to stare darkly at Katherine before replying. "I am waiting for someone," she answered briefly in French, with a small air of dignified reserve.

"Oh! I see," Katherine murmured, and being taken by those solemn eyes she lingered, extending another cluster of violets from that depleted bunch. "But it is too fine a day to be waiting, isn't it? You ought to be out picking these."

Rather slowly the little thing's fingers closed about the flowers. "I thank you," she said primly, accepting the necessity for so doing, apparently, as part of her lot.

A stolidly reserved mite, Katherine reflected humorously, abandoning her attempts at friendliness and starting on, when a sudden joyous shout made her look back. "Robert!" cried the little girl with a vigorous American sounding of the "t," and running from her lower step she cast herself jubilantly upon a young man just entering the door.

Katherine stared involuntarily; the young man, a stalwart, black-browed fellow, was just fitting his key into the door of the first-floor studio. Katherine remembered that black-browed young man. She had caught a glimpse of him once or twice in passing in or out; she had heard that he was Robert MacNare, a sculptor, an "arrived" sculptor, as Madame Bonnet had stated succinctly, but the impression which pervaded all others came from the day of her arrival, when, trailing

up the stairs in the wake of Madame Bonnet's creaking stoutness, she had been startled by a stocky, blue-bloused figure darting out to the bottom of the stairs and shaking an admonitory fist after madame.

"Pas de chanteuses!" he had barked ferociously, adding, "No singers, mind!" in unmistakable American for Katherine's benefit, and madame had turned smilingly and waved a pacific reassurance, "Oh, la, la, jamais, au grand jamais! Pas de chanteuses, monsieur, pas de chanteuses!"

The memory of that moment made Katherine's lips twitch in irrepressible humor, and finding herself thus caught in staring back and smiling she spoke out frankly to the young man whose neighbor she was. "I have been trying to make friends with the little girl—but she was rather shy of me."

The young man gave her a just perceptible glance and turned the key in his door. "She has the bad taste to be unsocial, mademoiselle," he rejoined curtly, stepping briskly into his studio, the mite of a child at his side.

His manner more than implied that he also was speaking for himself.

Katherine found herself alone—and very warm-cheeked. "Surly!" she thought furiously, and then, "Why did I stop and speak to him anyway? It was a silly thing to do! But he might have been *human*. . . . I suppose that little thing is his sister. She's American, then, for all her French air. . . . I wonder if she lives there with him?"

Continuing to wonder at the relation between the odd

pair she reached her own studio, directly above that of the black-browed young man, and her vexation went streaming from her at the sunny pleasantness of the room.

It was a bright airy place, with windows to the west and north, and it offered the instant impression of having been taken by storm after years of primitive occupation and vanquished by feminine civilization. To be sure, the large easel by the north light and the litter of paints and sketch-boxes on the window seat appeared very much as it might always have done, but by the western window a couch was gaily cushioned in yellows and grays and a low table by it held books and photographs, a basket of sewing and a bowl of jonquils, while another table, bearing a fat lamp and more books and writing things, stood between wicker chairs before a cavernous fireplace.

In the center of the room hung an electric light, proud triumph of progress to madame's heart, and beyond a narrow door was a small retreat where the miracle of running water might be spasmodically observed.

As Katherine entered the studio Madame Bonnet creakingly descended the stairs from a trip to the lodgers overhead, two American ladies of middle age, and paused upon the threshold, having a few words to speak, it appeared, upon the subject of a *blanchisseuse*. Katherine's choice met with darkly hinted disapproval. Madame had her favorites and played them vigorously. She was a stout, substantial old lady, girdled with a medieval jingle of keys. Her wrinkled face was a map

of shrewd experience, and if the small, bright eyes beneath the beetling brows proclaimed a trifle derisively that their owner was no man's fool, they also added that there were honest folk in the world and she knew when she was treating with them.

Now, as they rested upon Katherine, those eyes were of a philosophic toleration. That a girl, so young and pretty, with such yellow hair and childlike eyes, should come so far from her home to sit in an atelier and copy naked people, that she should make here a mock home of screens and couches—it was all part and parcel of the American madness. So lunatic—and so young! Madame Bonnet had seen many women come to Paris for some art's sake; she had seen many hopes withered and many hearts drained, but she had never seen one quite so young nor so exceedingly cheerful. She was always smiling, this mademoiselle—and in the name of Heaven, why? . . . She should be safe at home, where the good God would send her a fitting husband, and not be here squandering her dowry in senseless paint and couch-covers.

Such were Madame Bonnet's inmost thoughts as she stood on her lodger's threshold, discoursing leisurely upon the *blanchisseuses*, and watched Katherine, kneeling triumphantly over a prostrate screen cover, nailing the last edge of gray burlap in snug place.

Katherine liked Madame Bonnet and liked to listen to her expressive French. Moreover she was not yet inured to the solitude of her much-loved studio, and was not always proof against the insidious waves of loneliness and homesickness to which she never referred in her

bright letters home. When she was at work in the Académie she forgot everything, but in the outside hours there were many little chinks not yet filled, and the newness and foreignness of her life, so delightful in general, held occasional little aches of remoteness and disconnection.

She wished that her mother and father could see her studio. She transferred it minutely to them in her voluminous letters, with descriptions of the Académie, of Guerin, the master, of Etienne, the genius, and Olga, her inform nt. Her letters reflected her serenity, her happy assurance, her sense of the miracle of life. On one thing alone were they silent.

Suddenly madame broke off. She listened, her head a-cock, and Katherine waited, her hammer in her hand. She hoped the Whartons would not arrive until her screen was finished and in place.

"Ah, the voice of the monsieur below!" said madame with impressiveness and creaked hurriedly from the room, to lean over the rail. In the silence the voice of the monsieur from below was distinctly audible.

She turned to Katherine.

"He desires to know if mademoiselle is to continue for eternity?" she reported simply. "He is annoyed."

"Crack!" went Katherine's hammer upon the next nail-head.

"There is but a little more to do," she responded coldly. "However that little is necessary."

Madame did not return to the hall with the communication. She appeared aware that the gentleman below had relieved himself with a question purely

rhetorical. She merely shut the door behind her as if that diminished the sounds falling upon the floor.

"I have a right to make a screen," said the girl spunkily. "Or doesn't he let you rent rooms to people who make screens?"

"Of that he had said nothing," replied madame with fine simplicity. "To singers—no—nor young ladies who practice the piano. He is of a particularness, that man! But then, it is not necessary to take such lodgers. Here there are always artists, or ladies who study at the Sorbonne, like the Americans above, or young gentlemen at the Ecole des Mines, or——"

Afterwards Katherine was a trifle ashamed of the vigor of the blows that sent those last nails home. Undoubtedly she made the poor man's ceiling quake! And since he was a sculptor probably he was sensitive to vibrations.

But her remorse did not have time to mount. The screen was no sooner triumphantly in place than the Whartons appeared upon the threshold in Madame Bonnet's stead, their arms filled with generous last things for Katherine and her studio.

As they sat about the low tea-table in the western sunshine, the steam rising from the tiny kettle and the air fragrant with crisp cakes hot from the pastry cook's, Katherine felt a keen sense of loss in their departure the next day. She would miss them. They were home friends, those two dear Americans; with them she had begun this miracle of a foreign year and their going would cut a stanch tie.

Their interest in her work was genuine and a little

anxious, and she found herself enthusiastically reassuring them that she had found the right place and the right master.

"It's the only place where they really teach you to paint!" she declared with the fervor of the disciple. "I'm seeing things I never saw before—and I'm doing things better already."

"But that other Académie was very much praised," Miss Ellen demurred. "And Monsieur Simon is such a delightful gentleman——"

"Monsieur Simon is a delightful gentleman and Monsieur Maynard is a delightful gallery god, and they are both delightful painters!" exclaimed Katherine. "And they come in turn each week and never remember you unless you have been there three years—so Olga says. Now here Monsieur Guerin knows you. And he knows your work. Why, he asked me this morning," she proceeded triumphantly, "why I made the same mistake in a neck that I made in a pose three weeks ago!"

"Why did you?" said Miss Anne worriedly.

Katherine's lips twitched. "Because necks are the very Old Harry," she murmured pensively. "Now if it were only legs—I could do a centipede with assurance!"

Something in the two pained faces before her caused her to hurry violently from that topic. She suspected that they would ask her presently if the legs had stockings. . . . And yet, she reflected, as she rambled on about her classes, they reveled in the Old Masters. . . . The distaste was for masterpieces in the making. . . .

She was telling now of the *croquis*, the sketch classes

at four in the afternoon to which everyone came, masters, pupils, arrived artists.

"You stay when you like and pay fifty centimes when you leave," she explained. "And such models! The beauties who don't come to the schools, who only pose at the artists' private studios, come to the *croquis* after hours to make a little extra money. There was a girl yesterday—a young Valkyrie! There was Norse blood in her I know. Tall and strong and deep bosomed—with an arm that could throw a spear and a pillar of a neck that could bear a helmeted head proudly! And her skin was like silk with muscles that rippled when she moved. They say Roulier is doing her as an Amazon. I wonder what the Amazons' sons were like—and whether *they* stayed on at home."

"I hope the things one hears about them are not so," Miss Ellen observed, sipping her tea.

Katherine stared. "The Amazons?"

"The models."

"Oh! Poor things—I'm afraid that they are." Katherine looked momentarily depressed. "However," and she brightened, "they aren't half as bad as the things one hears about the Americans here!"

"Not the representative Americans." Miss Ellen's distinction was rather fine. To her the exuberant millionaires of recently naturalized forebears were no more Americans than the incoming Slovak woman with her shawled head full of superstitions. To be an American one must inherit spiritual responsibilities—or invest heavily in them for oneself.

She refused severely to accept as American that rich

and rapid clique of Paris spenders whose gay doings were just then filling the Parisian journals. "That woman's father, my dear, was an illiterate trainman. He came to our country simply to make money—the money which she is spending now abroad. He may have had a vote—but I trust you do not call him an American?" was her disposal of the matter.

It was a fine and solitary discrimination.

It was Miss Anne who on her way from Katherine's easel paused at the writing-table and discovered a framed picture there.

"Why, Katherine, this looks like—" The discovery leaped from her lips with involuntary surprise. Then determinedly she went on with it, feeling a certain responsibility.

"Is it—Captain Edgerton?"

"Yes. He has just had that taken," Katherine responded with a brightness almost too casual. "He sent it over this week."

A queer little silence fell.

Miss Anne stood looking down at the picture. She noticed that Katherine had it in a silver frame. And she thought, worriedly, that he was a very fine-looking young man, indeed.

"You are writing, then?" Miss Ellen's tones held a cool implication of wonder.

"Why, yes—and when I sent him some of the snaps that we had taken on shipboard he reciprocated with this photograph." Then Katherine hated herself for the

weakness of the explanation. She took the picture from Miss Anne and extended it to Miss Ellen.

"He's rather conquering looking, isn't he?"

"He is a very soldierly young man." Miss Ellen held the picture a moment and then set it upon the tea-table, where its straight, lifelike glance looked out directly upon the little group.

Katherine felt again that odd, subtle, hampering sense of their disapproval creeping over her. And why? Was it simply the precipitation of the friendship which made it distasteful to their notions of dignified progress? Did they think her too impulsive? Too—impressionable?

She smiled a little wistfully over the picture's head at the elder woman.

"Dear Miss Ellen," she said, "life can't always be a minuet. Sometimes it must waltz. Sometimes the *tempo* is *accelerando*."

Faintly Miss Ellen's fine lips smiled. "So it would seem, my dear. But I doubt the wisdom of so much haste."

"Are the only right impulses then the—laggard ones?" said the girl, resenting. "Is truth never in first feelings?"

Miss Ellen merely smiled again with that arching of her brows which was like a shrug, and Katherine was left with a sense of baffled defeat. . . . She did not know that Miss Ellen was remembering a day of thirty years ago when a young man had brought her his photograph in the West Point uniform. They had not been lovers then, not avowed lovers. . . . She remembered his

little formal speech of presentation. . . . And for twenty-nine years he had been lying in the churchyard. . . .

The memory did not give her any sense of sympathetic kinship with this other girl and this other photograph. It brought her only the loneliness of detachment, the sense of remoteness to this heedless onrush of the present. She did not think of Katherine's feelings as being in the least like her feelings of thirty years ago.

It was Miss Anne who made answer to Katherine's impatient question. "First feelings may be quite true to the moment," she said mildly, "but they are not always true to second feelings—are they? . . . I am only afraid that you are apt to be a little impulsive at times, Katherine—and then have to undo it later."

Katherine, drawing fresh water for their second cups, was saved an immediate reply. She thought, as she relighted the alcohol lamp, which was subject to draughts, that if they had read in a book about her friendship with Jeffrey Edgerton—Miss Anne, especially, was addicted to mild romance—that they would have deemed it a beautiful and youthful expression of sincerity. But because it happened under their very noses, she put it to herself somewhat heatedly, because she was just an everyday girl instead of a book heroine, why they thought her a forward little minx to write a young man like that—and let him send her photographs! There was something vaguely cheapening to them in the greedy haste of youth. . . . Her vanity was sensitive to this thought of her.

And then she caught at Miss Anne's last phrase. "Undo it? What do you mean, Miss Anne?"

"Well—you didn't quite know your own mind about Richard Conrad did you?"

"He didn't always know his about me. He found out first, that was all. . . . But—but this is quite different, please!" The self-conscious color was deepening in her cheeks, but she spoke with an assumption of airy ease. "Because he sends me a picture, Captain Edgerton isn't in the least a devoted suitor."

"Englishmen take these things more seriously than our men, my dear. For him to write you and to send you his photograph argues that he is taking a real interest——"

"And to accept the picture is leading him on?" Katherine laughed with increasing constraint.

"Either that—or you are permitting him a flirtation," Miss Ellen answered unexpectedly as Miss Anne hesitated. "His inclination may be going a little faster than his head will follow."

It was a startling and an unpalatable thought. Katherine betrayed her naïve astonishment in a soft stare, and then she threw out a little ripple of derision.

"Am I so very ineligible, dear Miss Ellen? Don't Englishmen like young ladies who paint—canvases?"

"An Englishman of position thinks of more than his inclination," pronounced Miss Ellen. "I think that water has boiled enough, Katherine."

"I beg your pardon. . . . Well—I promise not to break my heart over him, then. Nor to let him break his over me. I guarantee it a thoroughly coöperative

friendship of great mutual uplift and enlightenment," Katherine ran on at random, hurrying to pour out the tea. "But now do tell me about Versailles. I was so sorry I couldn't have had that experience with you."

And she thought, as she listened to their accounts of the previous day's trip, that it was a fortunate thing that they were not clairvoyant to the letter lying in the portfolio upon her table. For Jeffrey Edgerton was coming to see her a week from that Saturday, "God and the Colonel agreeable," he had cheerily written.

Even to read his brief words brought her a vivid sense of him, tall and straight and merry, a vivid feeling of his personality. That feeling had been very strong those first days in Paris. . . . The journey from Boulogne had been an outer blank, beneath which she had given herself over to dreams and revery. And at first even Paris, party-colored, kaleidoscopic Paris, had beat upon the surface of her senses in vain. She had lent it no more than a veiling attention.

Yet swiftly that dreaminess had worn away. The continued impact of the novel sights, and the quick plunge into the work for which she had come, had set up their reactions. Edgerton seemed something remote and apart from her present life, and though his letters, arriving regularly each week, revivified the keen sense of his personality, they did not bring him into relation with her everyday existence.

She was perfectly content with this. Life was going on splendidly. It was enough to have his friendship for her speaking in the interchange of letters without its reappearance in her daily actual experience. From that

reappearance she secretly shrank, partly from an unacknowledged feeling that it was putting life to the question too soon, and the announcement of his intention to come was causing her many a flutter.

There would be something significant in that meeting —or something flatly disenchanting.

"You won't like me a bit when you see me again," she had written him promptly. "My fingers are always painty—and I'm so fearfully impressed by your taking time to come that I shall be dumb with awe."

"I'll risk it," he had scrawled back, and underscored, "*Especially the dumbness!*"

The consciousness of this intimate exchange kept Katherine a little flushed and defensive during the remainder of the visit. She had meant to refer, frankly in appearance but with misleading casualness, to the prospects of Captain Edgerton's being in Paris, but now she closed her lips upon it.

And she wondered, with a sudden gleam of abnormal insight, if Ellen Wharton's fidelity to the memory of that dead lover was utterly due to a broken heart, or to some secret disinclination to the full-bloodedness of sex, from which she was willing to stand forever apart in the sanctifying purity of her grief. It was a mere flash of transient thought, not wholly just to the woman before her, but it held its element of truth. . . .

Katherine felt suddenly tenderer toward Miss Anne. And she wished that she would meet some thoroughly nice man, fall tumultuously in love with him and marry him at the consul's in post haste.

It was a pity these revelations didn't occur.

But the matrimonial times had been out of joint for gentle, careful Miss Anne.

How pale life would be if it were done with splendid hope! Pity the heart that never risked its argosies of adventure.

In showing out her guests downstairs and lingering over their last farewells she blocked the way of the man who came plunging out his first-floor door. She stood aside to let him pass and he made a reluctant motion toward the slouch hat tugged down over his black-browed eyes, but he did not send a glance in her direction.

And Katherine, able wholly to laugh now over the encounter of the afternoon, pointed them gayly to his big, retreating back.

"He bites," she said mysteriously, and she christened him to herself for all time. "My neighbor—the Surly Man!"

## CHAPTER VI

THE little dinner at the Lilas proved merry. The warm April evening had precipitated an onslaught of marble-topped tables upon the sidewalk where the Boulevard Montparnasse crosses the Avenue de l'Observatoire and as the two girls sat at one, awaiting their order, what more natural than for Etienne de Trézac to saunter past with a friend, and what more agreeable—as it happened—than for him to ask permission for them to dine together?

De Trézac's friend, a medical student, was also, it appeared, a friend of Olga's, and though a discriminating spectator might have observed, at the first, a slight estrangement between them, a stiffness upon his part, and a defensive antagonism upon hers, Katherine was far too occupied with the novelty of De Trézac's acquaintance to perceive those fine shades of the past which indeed swiftly melted into a more congenial though intermittently ruffled present.

Katherine found De Trézac charming. He seemed to her a most engaging boy, rarely gifted, and all the more interesting for his French differences, and she accepted companionship with him, ready friendship,

even, with that thoughtless confidence which makes the American girl so bewildering to the foreign observers.

The talk was rather three-handed, with Katherine putting in only an occasional interested word or question. In the beginning it dwelt mildly upon the schools, the exhibitions and studios, but presently it ranged with freedom and liveliness; during the chicken it concentrated in a debate between Etienne and Louis Arnaud concerning the veracity of some experiments that a noted chemist was conducting, and by the salad it had veered, unexpectedly, to systems of philosophy with intimate and personal applications.

"But you—you find in pleasure the end of life," Louis asserted gesticulating, one confesses, with a fork. "That is the fine substance of *your* philosophy!"

"Naturally. It is the philosophy of all the world," said Etienne calmly, "though one may mask it with names. . . . What else is glory, fame, high office, discovery, but the particular kind of thing that delights one? Pleasure—that is the sap of gratification which each flings, in one form or another, to this monster of an ego within." Smilingly he tapped on his slender chest. "What name do you give your philosophy, my friend?"

"Achievement," said Arnaud with a snap of his jaw.

"Achievement? . . . But that is to say that your ambition is the hunger of your ego for the pleasure of distinguishing itself from other egos, of receiving acclaim, recognition. . . . Gratified pride—is not that your pleasure?"

"But the pleasure of achievement is different from

pleasure in useless gratifications—and distractions."

"Not at all," said Etienne calmly. "It may be the only one to which your harp of one string vibrates, that is all. What you call distractions may be the reactions of a more plentifully endowed nature."

His laughing eyes turned to Katherine and found her smiling at his mockery.

"There are higher pleasures," Louis began doggedly.

"Oh, as to that—granted! There is the pleasure of painting a Venus—and the pleasure of eating an omelet!"

"And the pleasure of making love to a pretty girl," Olga thrust in, her chin in her hands. "Do not forget that, either of you!"

They both laughed on different notes.

"Where would you put that in?"

"Oh, above the omelet, mademoiselle, assuredly!"

"Then you would rather paint a woman than kiss one?" pursued Olga, with that impudent tilt of her little nose and mouth, that baffling inscrutability of her eyes.

"If we are speaking of generalities—yes," the painter blandly parried.

"And he—he would rather dissect a Venus than embrace her," Olga commented, with a mocking nod at Arnaud.

"One is a step up the way of truth—and one a descent into delusion," the young physician observed, not without his own sparkle of malice. He added, emptying the oil cruet upon his last lettuce leaf, "And an embrace leads to bonnets."

It was evident to Katherine that Etienne shared her

perception that the chatter was a trifle unabridged. He brought the conversation back with a quick thrust at Louis.

"You perceive, then, that in your philosophy of life which you call achievement, you are choosing only the gratification of the pleasure which appeals the most strongly to you?"

"At least I have chosen. And what I say is, that if you do not choose, if you spin about with all the vibrations which you term the reactions of your plentifully endowed nature you will land nowhere—and the end of your life will be regret."

"Show me the life without regrets," said Olga suddenly.

"True—but do not, at least, arrange to regret the most worthy of your possibilities."

Having consumed the last vestige of lettuce, Arnaud wiped up the plate with a piece of bread and then pushed it away from him, thrust his hands into his pockets, tilted back his chair and cocked his narrow, cynical head a trifle derisively at Olga.

The girl suddenly laughed. "Your choice then is not hamperingly large," she gibed, "that choice of your 'worthy possibilities'!"

Etienne turned to Katherine with a humorous mien. "And what is your philosophy, Mademoiselle King?" he inquired. "What do you seek in life?"

"Happiness!" she gave back on a note of laughter, but with an involuntary earnestness of avowal. Her clear, gray eyes, meeting his dark ones so frankly, revealed a trustful confidence in her bright quest.

And then, choosing her words more slowly, her faintly smiling lips seeming to deprecate her unnecessary seriousness, she added, "The happiness, I mean, of the realization of self—of the very most that is in one."

Quizzically he drew his brows together. "But according to our inexorable friend here, one must choose. . . . What kind of happiness? The realization of yourself as a painter? Or as a beautiful woman?"

The medical student glanced at her with sudden interest. He was attracted by her air of radiant health and vitality, by the freshness of her color and the slender firmness of her white throat that the open collar revealed.

"A beautiful woman, of course," he interpolated, but not without his air of underlying irony. "The epileptic can paint."

The girl glanced from one to the other, her candid eyes subtly appealing against their mockery. It was a discussion which she had often carried on secretly with life.

"Perhaps you think I desire to eat my cake and have it, too," she smiled. "But why must a woman renounce herself to be a painter? A man does not."

"But he places one thing above the other," Etienne said quickly. "He starves his wife for art—or he betrays his art and becomes—what is it that you say in America—a good provider? Yes?"

"Not always. Some wives understand—and share the adventure with them. . . . And for a woman it ought to be easier—in a financial way—because she is not the provider. . . . And why is she not a more successful

painter for being a woman who lives life—not evades it? . . . Every experience enriches . . . reveals——"

She paused, a little diffident of the deepening waters. Then, smiling, "Isn't every young singer who essays the great rôles told to go and have her heart broken?"

"But observe, mademoiselle, she is told to have her heart broken—not to realize its hopes," Arnaud pointed out, while Etienne watched Katherine's kindled face where her youth was dancing like a blown flame. "There is a difference."

"Indeed a difference, the chance of life," murmured Olga unexpectedly pensive.

"But the difference is in favor of happiness," Katherine replied to Arnaud. "Cannot one do better work with a happy heart, with a full inspiration of life, a stimulating gladness——"

He interrupted. "A happy heart is a time-consuming affair. . . . It involves the ménage—a deadening domesticity. One does not paint immortal works while one—" he appeared to interrupt himself, then resumed, "one prepares the meals, mademoiselle—or, if the ménage is rich, one plays the châtelaine. A pair has a place in society—and behold another Moloch for time. . . . But a broken heart is another thing. The affair is over and done with. The broken heart yields its essence of despair. . . . The painter lives in his work, feeds it with that despair, with that energy which love did not consume. . . . Behold the truth!"

But she would not yield.

"Does a broken heart stay broken?" she laughed. "The heart of *Romeo*, you remember, was broken for

*Rosaline*—and then he saw *Juliet!* You cannot stifle life of its meanings, its hopes. . . . And is it not better, from your cynical point of view, even, to have a happy love affair and once and for all safely occupy the heart——"

"Mademoiselle is an economist, then," murmured Arnaud.

"An idealist!" declared Etienne. "She pays the heart the tribute of assuming its constancy, when once its affairs have reached a happy conclusion. . . . But is it not your opinion, Monsieur Philosopher," he inquired of Arnaud with pronounced gravity, "that success in a love affair may prove less—engrossing—than a failure——"

"Take care," said Olga, in a low, hostile voice.

"I am but a speculator—in the realms of fancy," said Louis quickly, with a gay air. "Who knows but what Mademoiselle King is right, and a heart relieved by success and so freed from the strain of courtship may not turn to its work and spend itself there?"

"You are a beast," said Olga across the table to Etienne, who laughed, and raising her demi-tasse she saluted him with her impudent little smile but with cold eyes, "To your perdition!"

Katherine reflected that Jeffrey St. Preux Edgerton would judge the conversation extraordinary.

She thought it a little extraordinary, herself, but these were student days and to her comrades she gave the students' liberty.

She had found the little dinner *à quatre* so pleasant that she was frankly pleased to have it followed by

other dinners—now openly by appointment—and those led in the quickly ripening intimacy of student association to rambling and light-hearted expeditions about Paris in search of interest and diversion.

More and more she liked De Trézac. For all the tremendous differences of their environment and their perspective, differences but half understood by her, as yet, she was serenely sure that she and "Etienne," as it easily became after a fortnight of their comradeship, understood each other implicitly. And he was *very* good for her French, she wrote her mother cheerily, for he could not—or would not—talk English, and her French was becoming so rapid now that it fairly ran away with her!

Her Paris days were settling into more and more sharply defined ways. At the College Club she had met several pleasant American girls, but as most of them happened to be studying music the difference in interest drew them steadily apart. There was an English girl she liked, studying art at Julien's, and she saw something of her but not much for most of her time was given to her own Académie and the friends that she made there.

Two middle-aged American ladies she liked immensely; good, energetic souls, who after an arid youth of teaching drawing were at last realizing something of their long-deferred ambitions. Fortunately they had not yet realized how fatally deferred those poor ambitions had been. With them Katherine often went to Henriette's, that little restaurant about which cluster so many traditions of frolicsome student life, and with

them she shared the sly amusement provoked by intruding American tourists, lured by these old tales of high jinks, and woefully taken aback upon beholding many groups of compatriots, mild, feminine, sedate, with their sprinkling of gray hairs.

There were other nights, however, when Henriette's was not so decorous. Then it was the Americans, the younger Americans, more than the French students, who upheld the riotous tradition, but the most sympathetic eye could not find in the babel of laughter and corks the romantic gayety of the *Mimis* and the *Rudolphs* of the past.

These were the days when Katherine's work absorbed her, when she lived from day to day in an enthusiasm and ennobling delight that was like a spiritual flame in her. Her passionate preoccupation would have worn down a youth less buoyant and healthily gifted. She painted at the Académie every morning and often afternoons; but her habit was to work in her own studio in the afternoons, at experiments of her own devising, returning to the Académie for the *croquis* at four.

At first she had been shy of herself and distrustful of her ability among these strangers, but her gift was genuine and asserted its power. And she had been splendidly trained with nothing to unlearn. She painted, Guerin finally told her, like a man. Her effect was simple and bold and strong.

"It is a pity you are not a man," Guerin observed, studying one of her half-finished canvases.

Her eyes steadily, a little too defiantly, interrogated him.

"Oh, yes, you understand," he answered, dryly. "You see now how you work—you know that you are painting against time."

That held its barb of truth for her. She realized indeed that if ever her work was to justify itself, was to be of paramount concern in the ordering of her life, it must take its place of honor as soon as possible. Etienne, her fellow-student, had scant sympathy with work when it conflicted with his suggestions for an outing, and the way of the world outside that studio was to take it as the pleasant time-serving of talent, and to assume that what life had only to deal with was a gray-eyed girl with a fresh and wholesome color, and a healthy appetite for experience!

She knew, for instance, that Jeffrey Edgerton no more thought of her painting as a thing to be seriously reckoned with in his attraction for her than he thought of her embroidery. Probably he had not even attempted to analyze his impression upon the subject, but if he had it would have been undoubtedly that she sketched very cleverly and would make some pretty things to hang on the walls. As for serious work—probably he thought that there she painted badly, very badly indeed, but Katherine felt intuitively that his loyalty would always stanchly insist that the things were "very jolly."

He had not made that trip to Paris upon the expected Saturday. Neither God nor the Colonel had been favorably enough inclined, it appeared by the disposition of events, for an absurd epidemic of measles had broken out in his quarters and he was quarantined.

It was the telegram apprising her of this that brought the first sign of humanity from the Surly Man.

In the two weeks that had intervened since her ill-advised utterance of neighborliness she had seemed to run upon that man on almost every occasion—and without the least softening of their edged aloofness to each other. In general they appeared not to see each other. When this desirable abstraction could not be maintained—for instance when dashing violently against each other in a bundle-laden rush out a delicatessen door—his awareness of her personality—and reception of her apologies, for she had been the principal dasher, with some fatal damage to an eggy bundle of his, she surmised—had been accomplished with a maximum of ill grace.

But when the telegram came, when Madame Bonnet handed it interestedly out to her from the little cage as she sped into the hall on her return from the Académie that Friday afternoon, and she stood rather dumbly there, reading it over the second time, a voice came out of the shadows by madame's recess that was so mild that it was not for a minute recognizable as the voice of her neighbor.

"No bad news, I hope?" he offered, coming forward awkwardly.

"Oh, yes," said Katherine dully, and then, "Why no—no. It doesn't matter," and she fled up the stairs in a frame of mind as distracted as her stupid speech. In sharp reaction from that first blank disappointment came cowardly relief. The awkwardness of meeting was postponed for a time. She wouldn't have to lie awake to-night, planning what they would do, and what she

would say—feeling foolishly expectant in the thought of that momentous visit . . . feeling chagrined if it fell flat and uninspired. . . .

It was better to have his letters going on as usual.

And yet, after all, that was a very blank Saturday. On the whole, so her mood veered, she wished he had come and had it over with.

The first visit appeared rather humorously in the aspect of a dose of medicine on whose success the rest of their friendship depended. Decidedly she was a young lady of too much humor for her own tranquillity.

Sunday, also, opened very emptily. In expectation of Edgerton's arrival, she had declined a trip to the Bois with Etienne and Louis and Olga, and now the perfect loveliness of the day, the relaxing warmth that lured and beckoned, waked restlessness and discontent as she sat over her coffee and rolls in a neighboring crémerie.

Then she became aware that the Surly Man and his small charge were at the next table, also at breakfast. He had his back to her, his big shoulders hunched over his paper, a coffee cup in his hand. The child faced her, gravely staring above the rim of her mug.

Presently when the Surly Man wandered off about the shop, collecting favorite rolls, the little thing slipped deliberately down from her chair and came slowly to Katherine's table, standing looking at her with that dark, unwavering gaze.

"She's not unsocial," thought Katherine, with a little flash of indignation. "She's only—shy!"

She smiled, a little shyly herself at her visitor, half fearful of frightening her away.

"And what is your name?" she said in English.

"Peggy," said the child clearly. "Peggy in English. . . . In French I am Marguerite."

"They are both very pretty. . . . But which do you like the best?"

A grave consideration of this dwelt in the little girl's face. Then she turned, cast a sudden glance across the room at the Surly Man returning to the table with a heaped plate, and then gave Katherine a look, fleeting, mysterious, embarrassed.

"Peggy," she said with a little gasp, as if her reasons for it made it a confession, and turned and precipitated against the Robert that she adored.

Few young men care for the impetuous affection of a public attack that grips them dangerously about the knees, but the Surly Man, though Katherine saw the color mount in his face, offered no suggestion of rebuke. Having clasped a steadying hand an instant over the rocking rolls he put that hand down upon the little girl's head with a gesture of affection that was curiously touching, and when he had lifted her back upon her chair, and buttered a fresh roll for her and refilled her mug, Katherine registered a sudden, enlightening discovery about him, also.

"Perhaps he's just shy, too!" she thought.

But that was not wholly the case.

It became the case for her thoughts, however, and she saw the young man's gruffness through eyes of sympathy. He was so oddly alone, with that little sister—

and how the child adored him! The English Peggy had been dear to her because it was the name of her brother for her—Katherine had divined that in a flash. What old little things they were, these mites, and what quaint things went on in back of their heads!

And as she watched the two of them—for the young man's back was to her and his paper again engrossed him—she saw that the child had a droll way of drinking only when he did. Several times the little Peggy gripped her mug firmly, in hopeful expectancy, but if the young man put down his coffee cup or his glass of water untasted the child put down her mug. When he drank she drank, methodically, watchfully. . . . It was one of those queer secrets of childhood.

She wondered if the man knew, or if this hidden play went on unseen through all their meals.

At the end she saw that he knew. For he told the child to finish her milk, and as she hesitated he raised his own glass with an air of beautiful casualness and kept it at his lips until her milk was drained. And Katherine's sympathy went out to him in a queerly pitying way, although he appeared such a very self-sufficient young man, stoutly able to repel all manifestations of interest.

Perhaps it was his very air of assurance that made him all the more pitiable. The red wreath on the child's hat with that amazingly blue sash!

She wished, with a woman's intrusive and amiable recklessness, that there was something that she could do for them.

PROPERTY
OF THE

## CHAPTER VII

THE chance came with unexpected suddenness. On that very Sunday—a lonely, drifting one for herself, given over to letters and reveries and a brief walk upon the boulevards that disgusted her with all strolling Frenchmen forever, she told herself,—the little Peggy was taken down with cold and fever. Upon Madame Bonnet's mentioning, some three days later, that *"la petite, là-bas,"* was ill, Katherine discovered that the good madame was aiding in the nursing, although monsieur was devoted as a mother, madame declared, nodding emphatically.

Katherine put no questions, refraining from appearing to interrogate madame upon the subject of a young gentleman and an arrived sculptor, but she did make bold, with what she assured herself was unmixed kindness of motive, untouched by feminine curiosity, to tap at Robert MacNare's door and ask if there was anything she could do for the child. She had had quite a little experience with her small brothers, but she did not get as far as that in her little speech to MacNare.

She met with a scarcely opened door and a curt refusal. Thank you, but no help was needed.

On her way upstairs she thought of several things that she would like to happen. Particularly she hoped that Peggy would have fits—harmless fits, of course—in the night and he would come flying to her, craving her skill. . . .

It is not often that life falls into the whim of our suggestions. But two nights later, events unfolded with the thorough retribution of the third act of a tragedy.

At eleven o'clock the Surly Man came knocking at her door, a very distraught and hastily attired Surly Man, demanding, not beseeching, her presence on the floor below while he went for a doctor. He had wakened to find Peggy in a choking paroxysm. There was no telephone in the building and Madame Bonnet was spending the night with a neighbor.

Katherine was a little scared by this prompt response of fate, and when she hurried down with him, in informal dressing-gown and slippers, the child's condition shocked her beyond all thoughts but those of fear.

Peggy was sitting up in bed, gasping in a horrible, strangled way. Her tortured little face was darkening with blood.

"What is it? She never had this—" The young man hung over her in an agony of helplessness, one arm about the shaking little figure. Over his shoulder he flung a look that was a command at Katherine.

"You run like the devil for the nearest doctor! I daren't leave her. Try the one at the corner. Quick!"

But Katherine had seen croup before, though never such an extremity as this. She flew to the table where there were medicines and an alcohol heater and a moment

later she was holding a spoonful of white vaseline in the blaze, unmindful of her blistering fingers. Pouring the warm stuff into another spoon she gave it to the strangling child.

"She *must* cough it up," she said desperately. "She must!" And cough it up poor little Peggy did, with the last remnant of her gasping little strength.

And when her head drooped back against the young man's arms with a spent sigh, the dark color fading splotchily from her face, Katherine took her from him and sent him for the doctor.

MacNare returned with a slender, bearded man, whose keen brown eyes behind thickly convexed lenses stared rather hard to find the child, made sweet and fresh in her reordered bed drawn out in the middle of the studio, clinging to the hand of a very young girl in a blue dressing-gown with two ropes of light hair down her back like *Marguerite's*. Katherine had been too busy with Peggy to remember her own appearance.

Nor was the doctor's astonishment lessened by MacNare.

"Dr. Thibault, this is—er—" frowningly the Surly Man confronted his guest. "I don't believe I ever knew your name," he blurted.

Katherine turned to the doctor. "I am Miss King. I am on the floor above and came down when the child was choking."

For just one minute the Frenchman's face permitted the revelation of his thoughts. To have a girl with such hair on the floor above—and not to know her name! It

was incredible! Then he devoted himself to the small invalid, and when he had taken stock of affairs he turned toward Katherine again with an air of admiration that had nothing at all to do with her braids, and paid her the compliment that comes only sincerely to a physician's lips.

"You would have made a good nurse, Mademoiselle King. You have had experience?"

"With my brothers. Now if there is nothing more that I can do——?"

"You have done everything." He made her a grave bow.

"Then I'll say good-night."

At the door the Surly Man shot forward and gripped her hand.

"I'm glad you knew what to do," he said with a deep breath. "And I—I want—" Emotion too strong for speech was struggling inarticulately within him. He did not lift his eyes to her face. Some perception of the past blackness of his conduct was further complicating his expression.

"I'm so glad that I could help," said Katherine quickly. And then, emerging from her deep relief and gratefulness into a very human triumph, she spread her graciousness a trifle expansively. "And if you need me again to-night—or if there is anything that I can do to-morrow for your little sister——"

Abruptly his hand withdrew from hers.

"She is my daughter," he said hurriedly.

Then why on earth did she call him Robert? That

was what Katherine wanted to know, staring solemnly wide-eyed in the dark.

His daughter! How amazing!

It seemed a disconcerting fact, but presently her vigorous imagination, only momentarily stunned, laid hold of the circumstances and constructed an entire story. And its pathos reinvested the Surly Man with that draping glamour of romance from which the first shocked discovery of his wedded past had contrived, curiously enough, to divest him.

His young wife had been beautiful and adored. Her death had broken his heart and he hated all women because they were living while she was gone. . . . So he lived alone with his little child and his artist's dreams.

It was very tragic. And Katherine, having completed the creation, indulged a woman's passion for sequels. She reflected, as she yielded to her neglected sleep, that it was a pity that he was not ten years older. . . . Miss Anne was so sympathetic—when one knew her.

But the sculptor, unfortunately, was not much more than thirty.

However, since he had done with youthful romance, perhaps. . . . .

Sleep, impatiently, snuffed out the rest.

## CHAPTER VIII

"LIVE, live, live! The sun and stars shall light you!"

Forgetful of the ban upon songstresses, Katherine was caroling at her easel shortly after her return from the Académie the next afternoon.

"'Live, live, live! Some spot of earth invite you—
Live, live, live! Some face and heart delight you.' . . .

"Come in," she broke off her song to call, looking over her blue-aproned shoulder at the door, expectant of the American ladies from overhead who were to report about some tickets for a play.

At sight of the Surly Man, standing rather hesitantly in the doorway, she freed her thumb quickly from the palette and came forward in welcome.

"Do come in. How is little Peggy to-day? I inquired of Madame Bonnet at noon and she said that she was better."

"She is. Much," MacNare sententiously vouchsafed. He was in his sculptor's blouse, and his hands, though fresh-washed, bore unmistakable traces of clay about the

close-cut nails. It was evident that he had run up from his work on the spur of resolution.

"But you are busy," he objected, with a look at her easel.

"Only puttering. And I'd do better to let it alone a bit. . . . Will you take this chair? It's really man-size and comfy."

She spoke rapidly, intent upon pleasant hospitality. There was something about this gruff young man, with all his surliness, that stirred both feminine curiosity and a motherly impulse to soften his aloofness.

"No, no—I only came for a minute."

Katherine perched on the wide wicker arm of a chair facing him. She made no motion to take off her very painty apron, fearing that might suggest a criticism of his workaday blouse, and above its long blue folds her fresh-tinted face looked curiously small and young.

"And is the croup all gone?" she asked as he stood silent.

"Oh yes. Thibault says *that* came from too heavy a meal last night. . . . She was so much better from her cold then that I didn't know more than to indulge her."

"I expect you have your hands full," she ventured sympathetically.

He did not immediately reply and she saw, to her surprise, that a tide of dark color was rising in his rather white face.

"I don't know how to thank you," he said abruptly. "But perhaps you are really a person who doesn't care to be thanked—I've read that there are such persons!"

Katherine laughed. "Oh no! I like to be thanked



"'Come in,' she broke off her song to call."



much," she said mischievously. "Please go
d."

ry blankly he eyed her. Then meeting her smiling
he smiled, too, a little stiffly as one unaccustomed
is relaxing intimacy.

wish I knew how," he said. "Your promptness
l her."

)h, you could have brought a doctor in time. But
i too frightened to wait. Croup's a horrible thing.
re very fortunate that she never had it before. My
ıer Donald had more than one siege, poor lad."

gain he was silent, still struggling, it appeared with
ense of his deep obligation. "I wish that there was
thing that I could do to repay you," he ploughed
t last, uncomfortably intent, and she broke out in
tive opposition, "But I'm not a doctor so you can't
a check! And is a little neighborly kindness so
ensome to you?"

ɛr eyes met his with a sudden little flash. This time
s he who smiled the first, a slow and reluctant smile,
ssive of that quality with which she reproached him.
was the first time that Katherine had really looked
ıe Surly Man; he had been a vaguely featured,
:-browed person draped with the fog of both re-
nents and sympathies, but now her quick glance
rbed a host of impressions. He was *very* black-
ed, indeed, and black-eyed, with heavy black hair
ring low on a wide white forehead. His nose was
ght and finely cut; his cheek-bones were rather
y; his mouth had a grim, locked look, and his
re-jawed chin was blunt.

He looked like a person who made up his mind about things as a bulldog holds to a bone. But there came to her the softening memory, not alone of his helpless agony last night, but of the gentle way he had put his hand on Peggy's head that Sunday morning as she had gripped his knees in her impulsive onslaught.

Very decisively Katherine whisked the question of gratitude to the winds. "Will you feel better if I promise to have a spasm some night and call upon you? Then we'll be even."

Her flippancy elicited no lightness of response. He told her rather dryly, "Yes, I'd feel better if you would."

"How you hate to be grateful! . . . But you needn't be—really. It didn't make a particle of difference between us. You mustn't bother to speak to me any more than before, and when I make screens and things you can come and roar just as loudly in the halls!" She looked at him with a little-girl sauciness, swinging a restive foot. "The status quo," she added, her face tilted, its fugitive foreshortened lines touched with a gamin-like malice, "is undisturbed."

He shot her a suddenly aroused look under his dark brows.

"So you do bear grudges, after all!" he commented, with unexpected amusement.

"Not grudges—recollections."

"The bear that walks like a man?"

"Still you were very human—*once*," in justice she recalled. "Last week when I had a telegram and you asked if it were bad news."

"You didn't seem to know."

"Your sympathy upset me."

She had stirred him, at any rate out of the slough of his inarticulate gratitude. He seemed to be enjoying the saucy clash.

She went on quickly, "But I shall insist, however, upon being friends with Peggy. And now do tell me about her. Does she go to a school here? Or is she too young?"

And about Peggy, it seemed, once the stream of his speech were thawed, he was pathetically eager to talk. For the child was a problem. In the mornings she went to a little kindergarten kept by French ladies for similarly detached French and American children, and she had her luncheons there before the bus returned her, but the afternoons were difficult now that she was old enough to resent excursions with a bonne. She had few playmates and she was too young for more school.

"She ought to be out of doors," Katherine declared.

He nodded. "I know," he said rather humbly. "And I do knock off every day or so and take her out, but when I'm working—you know how *that* is?" His appeal recognized her as a fellow-worker and she felt gravely flattered.

"Usually she amuses herself in the studio when I'm busy. She's got her paints and her paper dolls—she's a self-sufficient child. . . . And of course, we have each other. . . . But lately I've realized she ought to have more of a young life of her own——"

He was walking up and down the studio, now, his hands under his baggy blouse, deep in his trousers' pockets.

Katherine mused a moment. "I suppose there aren't any relatives you could bring over—?" she threw out.

"Oh, God, no! Relatives!" He gave a stare of horror. "Fancy having relatives around—some woman." He jerked a hand free and ran his fingers through his thick hair.

"Never mind, you needn't have one," said Katherine hastily. "Why not just get some nice girl to take her out afternoons—say four a week—to play in the gardens?"

"I've tried. But it's not so easy to find the right ones. Peg's hated most of them—and when she hasn't *I* have." He stopped for a moment's silent recollection of certain obstructive memories. "Do you know of anybody?" he demanded. "I'd rather have an American than a Frenchwoman, because of the language. Peg knows more French than English now."

"I might hear of somebody at the Club," Katherine reflected. "There are lots of nice students who are glad to earn a little extra money—and in such a pleasant way. I'll find out."

"That would be good of you," he said simply. He seemed to have a fundamental masculine helplessness toward some of the practicalities of life, and she suspected that the skillful ways she had witnessed in his caring for the child had come rather hard to his slow unhandiness. Mentally she took him and his baby under her untried wing.

"I'll find you a splendid somebody," she promised with an infectious smile. "And sometimes, perhaps, you'll let me borrow her for some out-of-door hours?

You see, I haven't forgotten how I used to look after my small brothers. And it will keep me from getting too homesick."

"Homesick?" he said with a sudden frowning scrutiny of her bright face. A little quizzical gleam came into his dark eyes and he was about to speak when a knock sounded and he turned toward the door as Katherine moved to open it.

Again it was not the ladies from upstairs. Etienne de Trézac, a debonair and frock-coated Etienne with miraculously creased trousers and a waxen boutonnière in his lapel, with a cane and a high hat and lemon-colored gloves now held carelessly in his hands, revealed himself in conscious splendor.

"Oh—good-by," said the Surly Man abruptly. "I hope I haven't kept you," he muttered, plunging toward the door and ignoring the polite salute of the young man who stood aside to let him pass.

As the door closed De Trézac turned to Katherine with raised brows.

"So you know Robert MacNare?"

"Why, he lives below me. But how did you know who he was?"

"How did I know?" Ironically he laughed. "True, you did not present me—but do you think he is under a bushel? He is somebody—that one! There is no one to whom Paris looks with more expectation. Did you read what Rodin wrote of him? No?"

She shook her head, feeling an odd surprise. Madame Bonnet had insisted impressively that MacNare was an arrived sculptor, but she had never spoken of him to peo-

ple in the studios and she was not prepared for Etienne's complete respect. Generally he had a gibe for the most successful of artists.

His gibe now was for other things. "So he lives below? Well—that is convenient! He consults you, I suppose, about his great fountain?"

"His fountain?"

"Did you not know of *that?* Why to him was given the prize, the commission—but that is evidently not what he comes to talk to you about? No?" Under his laughter there was a stirring of something she faintly resented.

"He came to talk to me about his little daughter. She needs a companion for afternoons——"

"His daughter!" De Trézac's face registered a droll surprise. "So he has a daughter?"

"A tiny little girl. She lives with him. And of course he's rather helpless about her."

The young Frenchman nodded. "Well, well—I did not know that there was a petticoat in his life! But that is what is back of these hermits—*cherchez la femme!*" Then he added with a flourish of his lemon-colored gloves, "And so he comes to consult you about this daughter——?"

"Of course he does. We're both Americans. Don't be absurd, Etienne." The girl spoke sharply, annoyed by something lurking in his mockery which she but scantly understood.

"I grieve to have driven him away. . . . But then, he has so many opportunities." There was something besides mockery in De Trézac's manner. That quick,

"We're both Americans," of hers, had pricked the male instinct of domination. . . . He resented it, subtly. And, being Gallic, he mocked.

"Will you sit down? Or is this splendor for the Faubourg?" Katherine was aware of his formal descents upon his sacred at-homes of his relations.

"You have said. My grand-aunt's day." Etienne sighed dolorously. Then with retaliative malice, "And a *jeune fille*, I understand, fresh from the provinces, and lovely as the dawn. A veritable treasure. Ah, those *jeune filles* of my family's designs!" Then he permitted himself to smile, "However, this one—there is always expectation."

"How you will dazzle her!" Katherine mocked in her turn.

"Without saying," the young man responded equably, strolling to the little French mirror with its encircling Cupids which Katherine had rescued from a second-hand shop, and settling his tie with elaborate care.

"Well, I must be off, Katherine. I but came to——"

"To dazzle me?" she laughed going back to her neglected easel and looking at him over her shoulder.

"To give pleasure to your eyes," he agreed gayly. "A fine livery for a free man, *n'est-ce pas?*" He made a movement of derision toward his holiday attire.

"You know you really dote upon it—and your Faubourg," she murmured, picking up her brushes with fingers still sore from last night's burns.

He turned back at the door. "How busy you are. Am I to descend noisily—so that Monsieur MacNare will be aware of my departure?"

"You forget that I can pound on the floor," she gave back laughing.

To her astonishment, for she suspected nothing more in him than mischief, he colored.

"Truly. . . . Adieu," he said abruptly, and was gone.

She only laughed to herself as she added a reckless blue to the sky in the canvas. "What a boy he is," was her uncomprehending thought and it struck her as drolly irrational for one to think of Robert MacNare as accessible to feminine interest. . . . To her he was a man apart. She thought of his past and his grief as something impenetrable, impassable . . . permanent. . . . But Etienne, she reflected, was incorrigibly French.

Nothing that he had said made her in the least self-conscious in her eager young desire to be "nice" to the Surly Man and help him with his problems and his Peggy. Life seemed to have hurt him so badly that she gave free rein to her generous sympathies, and that fatal instinct of hers for giving pleasure.

Besides, she was so happy herself that it was a necessity to make others happy. Jeffrey Edgerton had written; another date was set, the first Saturday after his release from the quarantine, and her spirit was on tiptoe with expectation.

The other disappointment had been so keen that she had lost in it her dread of the awkwardness of the visit. She only knew that she wanted him to come.

## CHAPTER IX

IN the shadow-spangled restaurant of the Bois, where violins wailed, and the velvet-shod waiters came and went like genii, the light of the pink-shaded candles lay like a blush of pleasure on the little table. Between the pink candle-shades the girl's face shone to Jeffrey Edgerton like a rose tipped with sunshine. Happiness was dancing on her eyes and lips.

In her youthful white frock, with its mild display of her slender throat she seemed enchanting to him. His memories of the boat had always been of the out-of-doors, of blowing hair and wind-flushed cheeks and jaunty, boyish coats. Now in the sophistication of this Paris restaurant she had taken on new grace and dignity and her charm was more feminine and more alluring. The intimacy of the little meal *à deux* had woven its spell. Being fanciful, he thought it was like having a nymph of spring opposite one, and being in love, he thought, "How jolly to have her always like that at table!"

Unconsciously he was grateful to her for being all that he had dreamed. It had not been a simple thing to do—this dashing off for such a pursuing sort of visit. He

was tremendously aware, even in the winged rush of his attraction, of all the implications and the weight of things involved. He knew that he was taking what he very seriously called a "decisive step." . . . And he might be taking it toward a possible misadventure, an awkwardness, a disappointment. Suppose she were not all that his fancy had pictured her! He had faced that contingency very clear-eyedly in crossing, but he had forgotten it utterly at the first sound of her light, approaching feet. And now they had had Saturday dinner together and Sunday luncheon and Sunday tea, and this was Sunday dinner and in a few brief hours it would all be over and he would be taking his way back to England and his post.

But he was too happy now to feel the wrench of that. He was so proud of her, so openly glad at being with her, that this seemed the only reality in the world.

He wondered about her. Was it possible that this visit could mean as much to her as to him? . . . But was it possible that he could misread the bright candor of those eyes? It seemed to him that she was surely coming with him down the same spring-enchanted way—otherwise—why, otherwise, life would be too cruel, too bitter. And Jeffrey Edgerton had youth's glad confidence in its own conquering destiny.

Almost, being impetuous and a lover, he was tempted to put some decisive speech to her now, but the leash of common-sense still held. He knew that it was too soon. Dimly, without in the least analyzing it, certain reticences of hers, certain fleet intangible withdrawals before too pressing a moment, had made him aware that

precipitation would commit himself to her uncertainties.

Even in love he kept his head. A committed lover is less interesting. . . . Besides, a restaurant was not the place.

A little silence had fallen upon them. In the hours that had just been passed together there had not been many silences; with the eager freshness of children they had been busied remaking each other's acquaintance.

They had laughed away the first, fleet constraint of meeting. And her secret anxieties as to what to do with him those many hours, her guileless plans and decisions, had been wasted for Jeffrey knew his Paris and had his own plans of pleasant authority. There had been a late dinner Saturday, and a rambling stroll through favorite streets where the lamps winked up at them from the smooth Seine: there had been that day a motor to Versailles and a glimmering noon of April brightness, of playing fountains and holiday crowds; there had been a fleet dash back to town, and then tea in her studio as she had planned, and then—after an interval for rest and dress—this last dinner.

And in all that time, in all that strenuous youthful dose of each other's society, not one moment but of deepening pleasure. That was the young miracle of it. Their talk had ranged with the freedom and easy interest of youth; she had given him gay accounts of the Académie, of her acquaintances there, of Olga, of De Trézac, of the Club with the pleasant girls, of her studio and her encounters with the Surly Man. She narrated with becoming lightness the adventure of the croup and was not ill-disposed to the admiration which it evoked

in her devoted listener. That the notion which Edgerton received from her droll sketch of her neighbor was that of a crabbed and slightly elderly man, was not, of course, to be attributed to her intention. She did not really think of him as young. . . .

And Edgerton, in his turn, had his narrations. He had brought one or two snapshots to supplement them of his quarters, his fellow-officers and of his country home. The pictures gave only glimpses of Edgerton Hall, drolly foreshortened, but they were glimpses of a lovely house front, overhung with ivy, of an old tower, casement-windowed, and of gardens sloping to a river, their walks flanked by old-fashioned flowers.

"It's not much of a place," had said Jeffrey modestly, "but it's very jolly. And the gardens are great. To me they're the sweetest spot in England."

"They look lovely," Katherine had given back, rather shyly.

"I thought I had a good one of the rose garden, but Fred, the scamp, had secretly taken his pony on that film and forgotten to wind it. . . . You'd like the rose garden. It has a wall about it and a gate and a jolly old sun-dial in the center. . . . Mother loves it. She's famous for her roses."

"So is my mother," Katherine had answered with a sudden laugh of whimsical amusement. "But she hasn't any rose garden and wall and sun-dial—just a little side yard and an arbor—but she has the most wonderful crimson rambler over it in town! And there's a Dorothy Perkins on the porch that has figured in many a number of seed catalogs!"

"I know it's charming," Edgerton had instantly agreed.

She had shaken her head at him drolly, "Oh, no you wouldn't think it, really! For we haven't any park about us, and any sheep in the meadows and deer in the woods! And our neighbors on one side are so near that we look in each other's dining-room windows and in summer we can hear everything—and he isn't a professor that father likes! It's too bad that all you know of America is an estate on the Hudson. You can't picture the rest of us at all."

He had smiled at her in silence, not trusting speech. For how could he tell her, without seeming a clumsy flatterer, that that unknown environment must be the rarest in the world since it had produced such a miracle of a girl, innocent, intelligent, self-reliant, brimming with young laughter and simple friendliness?

But his eyes had not been dumb and that moment at Versailles was among the most golden of her memories.

Now, in the little quiet that had fallen on them at the close of dinner they drained their tiny coffee cups and Edgerton drew out a slim cigar from a dark enameled case and asked for her permission.

As she assented, as the attendant waiter leaped from the outer gloom to the ritual of the lighting, she found herself thinking how natural it seemed to have him there with her—just as it used to seem natural to round the corner of the deck and find him tramping toward her, his head bent, his cap pulled low, his pipe in his mouth.

At that memory she laughed softly. "It should be your pipe," she murmured nodding at the cigar.

"You remember the pipe?"

With a ludicrous little *moue*, "It made a very strong impression upon me."

He feigned alarm. "Oh come, you haven't it in for my pipe! What? I always use *very* good 'baccy." And he added, his blue eyes teasing, "You know I should hate to give up my pipe!"

"You wouldn't!" she retorted. "'A woman is only a woman——'"

He saw the sensitive color rise in her cheeks as she broke off. After all why not in a restaurant?

"Remember that sketch of the pipe—and me—that you made?" he suddenly demanded. Perhaps he felt speech was safest.

She nodded, a mischievous sparkle in her face.

"I've it framed. On my desk. It—it always makes me think of the way you looked when you saw me looking at it!"

"I ought to have looked," murmured the girl obscurely.

"That's my mascot," said the Captain fondly. "If it hadn't been for that bit of paper—flying out across my path——"

Katherine suddenly giggled. There was something little-girlish and guilty in that giggle which brought the young man's eyes to her.

"Can't you guess *why* it flew across your path?" she suddenly demanded, her eyes alight with mischief.

"Eh? What?"

"I threw it."

"You—*threw* it?"

"I did." She was softly laughing at his mystification. "I'd just finished it. And you came tramping by again, so lordly and aloof, that a horrid impulse seized me. I wanted you to see yourself as others saw you. I thought you'd be furious. It wasn't flattering, you know. . . . And so—I let it go—on the wings of chance. The wind did the rest."

She laughed again, that little prankish ripple of a laugh that enchanted him.

He affected sternness. "You—minx!" he brought out. "I *thought* you looked like a kitten in the cream—and I thought it was for discovery of your wicked pencil and I was sorry for you. Sorry! Ha!"

"That was when I began to like you," she amiably confessed.

"You *began* to like me!"

"It had to have some beginning on something! You didn't suppose, did you, that I—I evolved this violent friendship on first sight?"

But that was an unfortunate speech. It brought back the memory of that actual first sight, and a wave of hasty color surged into her cheeks and into his. Once they had treated that encounter laughingly but now that note was too forced. He felt shot with pain that another man's arms had been around her, another man's lips had gathered her sweetness to himself, even in the renunciation of farewell. . . . He lowered his eyes from that flushing face, that sensitively trembling mouth. . . .

Her own eyes were on her plate. She felt hot shame at the simple friendliness which had yielded her cheek to Dick Conrad. In deepening self-consciousness she

felt as if she had ignorantly squandered a secret treasure. . . . And to have been overseen, misinterpreted by *him*. . . . Yet after all, she had been no more than a friend to Dick. No more.

Jeffrey leaned across the table, his lowered voice a little strained. "May I ask you—I know I've not the least right—but is that other man *quite* gone from your life, your thoughts? Is it a clear field?"

She raised her lids till her eyes were looking into his. They were dark as pools of shadowed water beneath the heavy lashes.

"Don't you understand," she said quietly, "that it could never have been—I could never have let him kiss me good-by—if he had been anything to me? He was just a—dear friend." Her voice trembled slightly. "He is a dear friend now—but a very droll one. For he has quite accepted the fact that I'll never be more to him and to prove his own friendship and to save his pride perhaps, he writes me the oddest of jocular letters. . . . Some day he'll announce in them the discovery of the one and only girl. Then he'll forget that he ever thought of me but as a friend."

"That wouldn't be possible," said Jeffrey with a clipped little smile. "Was he—forgive me, but I would like to know—was he someone that your parents would have cared for you to marry?"

Katherine's eyes grew vague. "Dick is a dear boy—and his father is a millionaire—" she felt a queer little pride in bringing that home to Edgerton—"and my people would have been quite glad if I had loved him, but—but they never said one word to advise it. And

if I loved the town doctor's son, who is also a dear and *very* good to his mother, they would have been just as pleased, if you can believe it. They're tremendously unworldly souls. . . . But I—I did think about it," she confessed. "I liked Dick—and I wanted to be able to do things for people, and have things—yes, and I wasn't sure that I'd ever care for anybody else, in a—a different way. And all the books are full of regretted might-have-beens."

She laughed uncertainly. "And so I did think about it. But I didn't want to. And my painting saved me. It took me away and kept me free for the chance of life —the *splendid* chance——"

She brought it out radiantly with shining eyes. Her face was like a suddenly glowing mirror that gave to him the stirred depths of her feeling. . . . It was a magic phrase to her. It voiced that deep craving in her soul for high adventure in living, for glorious excitement, for fine passionate experience that would be the climax of all living. . . . Watching her, the young man felt both the glow of answering youthful enthusiasm and a leap of anxious pity for so sentient a creature, knowing so little, expectant of so much, exposed so confidently to all the world might do. . . . All the masculine impulse of protectiveness rose in him. . . . He felt a sudden desire to clasp that slim hand lying on the table. . . . He wanted to be alone with her, to speak his ardor, his devotion.

The waiter brought the bill. His train was inexorable.

The ride back under an April sky sown with stars

was a silent one. He was solicitous for her comfort but his hand did not outstay its privilege of drawing the wraps about her. In him, more than in her, was the consciousness of the exceptional conditions of their companionship, of her trustful, chaperonless estate. Everything that was chivalrous in him restrained him, but his look, at parting at the door of her building, was charged with a sudden flash of revealing attraction that sent her from him on the winged feet of dreams.

## CHAPTER X

THAT visit added a conscious excitement to her life, a quickening sense of something stirring about to happen. . . .

It was no longer possible to think of her friendship with Jeffrey Edgerton as a thing apart from her everyday world for he had crossed the threshold of her Paris days, and though his visit remained something unmerged, separate, distinct, her sensitive memory was constantly flashing forth pictures of his presence.

Those few hours seemed to have peopled her Paris with recollections. There were the magic streets she had walked with him, the cabs she had taken, the meals she had shared. There was the tea in her studio. And she would look up sometimes from a letter she was writing and see him there, young and soldierly erect, in her big wicker chair.

And she remembered, with a queer little smile hovering about her lips, that he had totally forgotten to ask to see her work, had never once looked at the easel at the study of a head which she had carefully arranged there. . . . Yet her smile was not the smile of a displeased artist, but a woman's smile. . . .

However she did not neglect her work in those days. She worked hard. It was not entirely that she was painting against time, as Guerin had accused, though something of that feeling unconsciously goaded her, but the creative spirit in her was deepening and taking on new strength and impetus. She had that sense of aliveness which comes to the creative artist in the freshness of his mood, that feeling of power surging and tingling to the finger-tips.

The world appeared wonderful. She felt herself in a blessed place in it, with heart-happiness and work-happiness like Aurora's steeds at her chariot.

There was a feeling of impending gladness in the air. Her gayety, her exuberance dived and circled like swallows through all her moods. Everyone was twice as delightful as before—Etienne was charming, Olga was droll, the Surly Man was touching in his new-found efforts at amiability. With so much inner happiness it was impossible not to pour it out upon every circumstance of her life.

Not a thought of folly crossed her careless mind. Etienne de Trézac's finished compliment of manner to her she discounted as part of his foreignness, and the gay pretense of devotion which he more and more assumed upon their expeditions was all part of the charming nonsense of their relation. Etienne was French; he belonged in a romantically exclusive Faubourg; he would some day have a title and income and marry a *jeune fille*. . . . These were student days. . . .

She was perplexed, to be sure, by certain freedoms between Olga and Louis Arnaud. They made less and

less pretense of concealing various intimacies of affection—his arm about her in a cab, in the Bois, or at some of the promiscuous *bals* which their curiosity led them to penetrate. But it was not these casual freedoms which provoked Katherine's speculation as much as certain intangible elements in their manner to each other. They quarreled furiously at times. Katherine often heard Olga's low angry voice some distance behind them on their walks, yet these storms never lasted long. And Olga never explained them.

"Louis is *bête!*" she would exclaim disdainfully. She always spoke of him in terms of airy superiority and her manner to him often was of insufferable impertinence, yet it was generally she whose angers veered first into contrition.

Neither of them restricted themselves to the society of the other and Katherine gathered that these excursions into fancy's fields were the cause of some of the acrimonious disputes.

Her notion was that some sort of sweethearts' understanding existed between them, opposed by difficulties of time and means, and perhaps position, for Arnaud's family might be above the orphan daughter of a wild Russian boyar and a lower caste Frenchwoman, living in such un-French independence on the little income the Russian father had left.

April had flowered into May and May had blossomed into June. The misty laciness of the trees was lost in luxuriance; the sky was like broad, bright washes of water-color. Every silvery stone of the gray old buildings; every arch of the bridges and gleam of the

river was translated into stronger and brighter effect.

The Americans were in possession of Paris. The big hotels were crowded; the streets flashed with motors bearing beautifully gowned women on their rounds; the windows glittered with jewels and glowed with chiffons. Laurent's and Paillard's were crowded luncheon centers; there were gay throngs at tea on the terraces above the Seine; the songs of violins harmonized the discordant shrillness of human chatter at the restaurants at the Bois or at the Café de Paris; the theaters were visions of costumes.

Katherine felt a touch of the invasion in the increasing prices in the big shops. Other Americans were there, too; her own kind as she called them—happy, eager-looking people, with Baedeckers and little books under their arms, looking up galleries and tariffs, pilgrimaging to the Louvre, to Versailles, to Les Invalides, climbing Notre Dame. . . . Some penetrated even to the threshold of her school and her restaurants.

More and more of these came as June went by and the vacation terms released the teachers and often she encountered acquaintances, or acquaintances of acquaintances, and the little tea-kettle on her table boiled at several hospitable parties.

It was on one of these that the Surly Man unexpectedly opened the door, and then turned as if he would bolt, but Katherine's quick call stayed him.

"Do come in," she invited. "We've been talking about you—for we've just been at the Salon and seen your Prophet."

A perceptible thrill ran through her guests, two teachers and a young niece of theirs.

"Have you a—a piece of art gum?" said MacNare abruptly, demanding the first thing his eyes fell on. "I'm in a hurry for a bit——"

With a strong suggestion of intercepting him, Katherine flew to the cube of it that he was eying. Not for him so simple an escape! There was mischief in her eyes.

"But you must meet my guests," she declared and rushed the introductions as if fearing a bolt in the middle of them. "Won't you take some tea with us?" she added wickedly.

"Never drink it," he uttered hurriedly, but by now the ladies had found their tongues, and were trying to tell him how much, how very much, his work had meant to them, and especially his wonderful Prophet. And was it any particular prophet or just a symbol?

They hastened to say all the kind and flatteringly-meant things which much impressed and none-too-resourceful ladies can find to say to the greatness of the moment, and MacNare glowered unresponsively upon them and edged to the door.

"But we mustn't drive you away—we were just going," one of the ladies protested and the rest rose obediently, gathering their wraps.

"But I'm going. I must get back to my work," said MacNare, and the eldest lady in ill-omened inspiration, turned to him with deprecating but insinuating sweetness.

"And your studio is just under this, isn't it? Dear

Miss King has been telling us a little about it. . . . I know it's a *great favor* to ask, Mr. MacNare, and from such strangers, too, but perhaps as dear Miss King's friends and fellow-Americans and *such* admirers—you would let us just *peep* in the door and see some of those beautiful things in the making——?"

MacNare's dark glance flitted past the three suppliants and laid the burden of its wrath upon Katherine —who twinkled back impish delight.

"There's nothing to be seen," he said crisply. "Nothing I want anyone to see."

"Oh but surely—we understand—if you'd just make us an exception?" the lady breathed, flustered but not knowing how gracefully to retreat from her importunities.

"It's a workshop—not a shop window," he said with his dry smile.

The smile misled them to further attempt. This time it was the niece who had pretty eyes. She raised them beseechingly.

"But that is just what makes it so interesting——"

"To ladies' curiosity?" he said ironically. "Good afternoon."

"He *is* a character, dear Miss King," breathed the eldest lady, with a politely dissembling air of enjoyment.

Katherine went down the stairs with them. When they had gone she rapped viciously upon the door of the first-floor studio.

MacNare opened it a less than customary crack, then seeing her alone, he flung it wide.

She marched to a table littered with tools and clay and thumped down a cube of art gum.

"You forgot to take this away."

She was smiling but her tone held a peculiar dryness. He looked at her silently under his dark brows.

"You are a Surly Man!" she exploded, facing him in intense exasperation.

"Oh! . . . Because I didn't let in that rabble——?"

"Rabble! . . . Oh, it wouldn't have hurt you," she cried, "to have let those poor things had their 'peep' for half a minute."

"They'd never have gone."

"I'd have seen to that if you'd been so decent as to let them in."

"Decent!" he echoed irritably. "What earthly good would it have done?"

"Everything—to them. It would have given them the feeling that they were really seeing Paris and famous folk—and that poor lady would have carried back wonderful impressions to the little school she came from."

"Impressions!" he snorted. "The woman was a fool, an ignoramus——"

"Your tongue does lose itself in compliment."

"Why does she pretend to interests——"

"Dear man, they're all she has! She doesn't know that she doesn't know and it's too late to unlearn her. So you might as well be kind for she's such a tremendously good soul, with all sorts of heroisms and sacrifices in her narrow, deprived life that she never thinks of as heroisms at all—just duty to sick sisters and grumpy father."



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"Is it your idea that I am to soften the mishaps of life to deprived ladies who don't know art from artificial by letting them make free with my studio——?"

She shook her yellow head at him in a kind of despair. "It's only that it would have been so kind of you. . . . And even if you didn't you might have been politer to them—softened it—made excuses."

"I don't soften things and I don't make excuses," he returned indignantly. "That's not in my character. And if I didn't hold my studio and my time sacred there would come nothing from them worth the intrusive curiosity of lady teachers or anyone else."

"I know—but these were my friends," she murmured with a shamelessly feminine change of front. "And if I hadn't thought them deserving of your forbearance I wouldn't have——"

"Oh, Lord Harry!" He ran his fingers through his hair with a gesture of fierce exasperation. "Well, see here—here's the key of this place. I'm going out. You can bring them here at your freedom and let them revel in impressions—" He flung his arms toward an attending circle of unfinished models. "Only they can't peep at *that*," he prohibited, indicating the model for his fountain under a shrouding cloth.

"But it was you that was the magnet——"

"The magnet—damn! I beg your pardon—no, I don't either. You deserved worse than that. . . . But if you've really set your heart on pouring that crew in here, on me, why—why"—again that distraught gesture through his rumpled hair—"why you get them back here again and I'll let them in. . . . Only don't

ask me to explain my 'revelation of a Prophet,'" he snorted.

She met his look with a face all gleams of laughing triumph. "Now you *are* nice! . . . But it's too late for you to suffer for it, for they are off to an unknown restaurant, and they are leaving in a rush to-morrow. . . . Besides, I explained you."

"Explained me?"

She nodded, a teasing little smile about her lips. "I hinted *mystery*—beneath the words of truth. I said that you were working and—and undoubtedly—there was *nothing here that you wanted anyone to see.* . . . Your own words, you see. And the dears guessed—a *model!*"

"A model?" He looked but faintly enlightened. Then a wry grin flickered across his face.

"You should have seen their slant looks at the door as they passed. . . . And they told me they *quite* understood!"

"And felt they were treading near to bacchanalian secrets?" He chuckled suddenly and Katherine wondered what made her so surprised and then recalled that it was the first recognizable sound of mirth she had heard from him in all these weeks of their increasing friendship. He was not a gloomy man, though taciturn to strangers, dry and unsocial, but never, even with little Peggy, had she heard him laugh.

She was still thinking about that and fitting it into her scheme of his tragedy when he startled her by marching up to her, his hands deep in his pockets, his dark head thrust forward with an air of active belligerency.

"It's all very well for you to preach to me—you have a sweet missionary spirit as no one knows better than my Surly Self," he said dryly, "but I have a few words of warning to say to you. . . . It's all very 'nice' to be agreeable to worthy travelers and deprived ladies—but there are plenty of other people's time for them to waste. . . . If you are ever going to do anything in the world and bring a harvest out of the seed that's in you, there's just one way—do it."

He drew a hand out of his pocket and shook it at her impressively. "Give yourself to it, body and soul. Keep the distractions down to the thinnest margin of recreation. . . . Save your strength and your time for your work. . . . That's the one condition of doing your best—and making your best better."

"And you think I—fritter?" She meant a touch of amusement, but she was too impressed by his force.

"Not much—yet," he acknowledged grimly. "It's natural—that makes it almost inevitable. . . . The unnatural and amazing thing would be to have a girl of your age and your"—he hesitated then shading his words with irony—"your degree of pulchritude consecrate herself to serious and creditable achievement. . . . You started in well at first. Now you're letting things get hold of you."

"Such as—?" There was trepidation behind the defiant innocence of her smile. But he surprised her.

"Such as that French popinjay—that chap that came in on you one afternoon, do you remember?"

She did and was amazed that he did.

"And I've seen you about with him constantly. . . .

That's all very well for some people but it's a blind alley and leads nowhere. . . . Don't waste your time on him. You didn't come over here to flirt with adolescent Frenchmen."

Her chin went up with a swift gesture of anger. Her eyes were gray as agates with all the soft and cloudy blue withdrawn.

"As I happen *not* to be flirting——"

"Then he is," he said bluntly. "Don't tell me. I know them. . . . They're daft about *la femme*. . . . You don't suppose he'd waste time on you if you weren't young and pretty, do you?"

His manner quite removed any trace of compliment. Her lips quivered with wrath.

"I think it's you who are daft about *la femme* to take that view of things! Can't you understand friendship, companionship——"

"*I* can—but *he* can't. Not so much of it. . . . And you'll be letting yourself in for a lot of time-consuming explanations some of these days if you don't let a little less companionship go a longer way."

"I suppose you think I ought not to go anywhere," she said in a childishly furious voice, "except to the Louvre with the two ladies from the Sorbonne."

"Oh no—I'll throw in a few outings with Peggy and me," he said coolly. "We don't count. . . . But that young Frenchman thinks he does or I'm mistaken."

"That you're mistaken is the kindest thing I can think about you," she retorted and felt that she carried the honors of war from the room.

One hour afterward she came downstairs again. It

was little Peggy who answered her knock. Robert was out buying strawberries the child explained; they were to dine in the studio and Peggy was to make chocolate.

Then, slipping into French with her best manners, the child asked if Mademoiselle King would care to join them—it would be a pleasure. She was a drolly repressed little thing in the French formality of her schoolmistress's phrases. Her emotions and her childish incoherencies were for her English.

Katherine declined with responding courtesy, then stood irresolute a moment, looking about the room, a larger one than hers, for here a partition has been removed, making one room of two. MacNare also rented the sleeping-room beyond, but Katherine remembered that Peggy's bed had been drawn out here the first time she had entered the place—that night of the croup.

Now, but for the little table the child was setting with slow care by one of the windows, there were scant signs of domestic possession. The big room was barren of artistic litter; it had a clean and wind-swept look. It was like the owner's life with the superfluous gone, leaving it stripped and barren of incumbrance, like a boxer entering a ring.

By one of the windows the model of his fountain stood beneath the shrouding cloth and one or two other cloths covered certain unfinished studies, while all about the room, ghastly white in the deepening shadows, were the pale creatures of the sculptor's hand. They were old acquaintances now to Katherine, but she seemed to feel them now as for the first time—the great torso study, straining in a Sisyphus endeavor, a fragment of an un-

finished Victory, a charming head of Peggy, a Greek runner, a Prometheus, a horseshoer, and a dozen other studies of man and beast.

The girl's eyes went from one to the other, then lingered upon the study for the Prophet. The impressiveness of the great marble at the Salon was not in the model, but there was power and passion even in the smaller clay of the gaunt and fiery Prophet, appealing with outflung hands and vision-touched lips to the multitude who turned from him in cynical incredulity, in ribald mockery, in dull oblivion and gay pursuits. . . .

As she gazed a great humility of spirit came upon her. She found a pencil and paper and wrote upon the edge of a clay, moist table.

> DEAR SURLY MAN:
>
> I am one of the multitude who did not heed the Prophet—and I am very much ashamed. . . . You are a Great Man who is patient with all my foolery and foolishness and very good to take an interest in my poor work. I am going to work very hard indeed, and when I am no longer young and pulchritudinous and tempted I may be on the line!
>
> You see I am joking again but that is only bravado. I am really very sad over my bad temper. K. K.

She left the little note on his plate and fled.

And Peggy, devotedly eyeing her Robert father over the strawberries wondered why he pocketed that note so carefully and then took it out and tore it into a hundred pieces.

## CHAPTER XI

TO the good resolutions of that note Katherine adhered steadily in the days that followed and she was the less tempted to wander from the Surly Man's counsels of perfection because Etienne de Trézac was out of the city at a family gathering at some country chateau.

The Académie was officially closed for the summer vacation but a substitute held morning classes for those who lingered, and there were sketching classes made up for afternoons in the Bois and about Paris. Sometimes Katherine worked with these; sometimes she went by herself.

Even in these few months of Paris study her advance was perceptible. Olga Goulebeff commented upon it with a jeer of irony.

"Ah, you will rival Etienne, our genius! Do you think you will be the dearer to him for that?"

Olga's nerves were often on edge. Louis Arnaud had left for the summer vacation. At first Katherine inquired after him with friendly interest, but to one inquiry if he had written lately, Olga had responded with a fury of derision.

"Toujours, . . . et toujours avec tendresse, je vous assure!"

Katherine's own spirits were subject to unwonted moods those warm June days. There were times when discouragement assailed her; when she distrusted her work, her power, her future. It seemed to her at those rather depressed hours that she was standing outside of life, futilely painting its reflections, while others worked in its real stuff.

It was the hard application of the day that brought these reactions of lassitude, but Dick Conrad's accounts of house-parties and motoring had something to do with them. . . . She was quite human enough to want to eat her cake and have it, too. . . . And the gray and yellow studio room seemed very far away on long, lonely evenings, from the dear associations of her home.

Jeffrey Edgerton appeared a person of many engagements and occupations. He wrote of a cousin's wedding, of the London season, of numerous acquaintances, of visiting officers. His life was very far away, too, from the old American interests. The England in which he lived and moved and had his soldierly being was remote. She told herself that she was glad he did not come again.

Sometimes—when she was very, *very* tired, and the colors were dull instead of clear and her lines were mediocre and unrevealing, she wondered if her splendid dreams would bring her only to the life of a maiden art teacher. They must have had *their* dreams, once—their human dreams, their hopes of glory. . . . She

cried dolefully into her pillow one night at the pitiful prospect. . . . And even if she succeeded, if she became a "somebody"—why, what would that really bring her? . . . The Surly Man was a somebody, a very distinguished somebody and some day he would be famous—but she thought him the most lonely creature that she had ever known.

She did not in the least want to be lonely and pitied or sensible and matter-of-fact. She wanted, with every fiber of her healthy, egoistic youth, to be splendidly and actively and happily occupied.

In these unwonted low spirits she came to rely more and more upon the companionship of Robert MacNare. Not that she said a word to him of her occasionally painful forebodings, but it was a comfort for her to be with someone as blunt and frank and uncompromising in his relation to the facts of life. She felt that she would learn truth from him if ever she asked it. She had odd fluctuations in her attitude to him. Sometimes, especially in the presence of his work, she felt queerly young and untried and aspiring in comparison with the greatness of his genius, and her manner was hedged with a fleet, shy diffidence of her discipleship, but generally she was too merry of speech and too saucy for reverence, and too responsive to the pity that he involuntarily waked in her to remember that he was a great man.

Their intercourse was peculiarly in the present tense. Katherine, to be sure, often spoke of her home, her mother and father and brothers, but MacNare's utter silence upon his own past environment made her sensi-

tive to constraint. His past was never touched upon between them until one night that she never forgot.

They had been speaking of Peggy. He had come up, one evening, to carry her away from one of her frequent visits to Katherine, and little Peg had refused to go until she had finished putting all the paper dolls to bed between the pages of the book they lived in—a lengthy and monotonous rite. Curled up on Katherine's couch she was sleepily murmuring, "Now I wash *'is* one's face and now I wash *'at* one's face and now I comb *'is* one's hair and now I comb—" ad infinitum after the manner of the repetitious Scribes and Pharisees.

In moments of intense happiness she spoke an odd baby jargon of her own; in dull, everyday affairs she was a stolid and reserved little soul.

MacNare, at Katherine's request, had drawn out his pipe, and was smoking while he waited, and Katherine finished a letter to her mother, thinking with a wave of homesickness how many miles it must travel before it would be brought up the steps of that old white porch into the eager hands awaiting it, and how, when her father came home from classes her mother would greet him with, "I've heard from Katherine to-day," and little Don would call out impatiently, "*When's* she coming home? When's she coming *home?*"

From such faraway thoughts as these she roused herself to try and banish the odd, worried frown that was knitting MacNare's black brows together. Peggy was the best topic she knew to bait his speech, but her low-toned mention of the child served to deepen the frown.

Yes, Miss Lowe, the new American governess of

Katherine's discovery, was all right, MacNare admitted briefly. Peg liked her; the child was certainly better for the greater outdoor freedom.

"And happier, too," suggested Katherine.

MacNare cast a glance at his little daughter whose oblivious head was sinking sleepily lower and lower. Her tousled black curls half hid her face, but one round dimpled arm was outflung over her dolls, and two fat knees and plump little legs were displayed between the short socks and her rumpled white frock. The picture was winning enough to lighten any parent's look of care, but the man's dark gaze did not brighten.

"I can do for her now all right," he muttered, as if to himself, "but by and by . . ."

By and by little Peggy with her great eyes and curls would be a handful for any man, most of all for a grimly unsocial artist who had cut the ordinary ties of human associations.

Katherine's glance had lingered on his set face, a veil of quick, human sympathy softening the bright directness of her eyes.

"It's hard," she said in a low voice.

After a moment MacNare turned his head deliberately and looked at her. "What's hard?" he said in a challenging way. "For her? For me?"

"For you both—to be so alone," slipped confusedly from her.

He drew a long breath upon his pipe and sent a cloud of blue smoke into the air. "It would be a great deal harder if we *weren't* alone," he said with a grim emphasis of satisfaction.

A sharp wonder struck her.

In the pause Peggy's faint croon came across the room to them. "Now I put 'is one here—now I put 'at one here——"

MacNare lowered his voice when he spoke again. It was held taut as a whipcord against all trace of feeling and the words came like a crack.

"Peggy's mother is not dead."

He looked straight at Katherine and she could feel the visible rush of her confusion to her unguarded face. She could not meet his eyes; there seemed something sardonic and defiant in their depths, and she turned her head away, a wave of bright color in her cheeks.

"Oh!" was all that she could find to offer. Limply she added, trying to sound matter-of-fact, "I always supposed——"

"I generally let people suppose." His tone was grating. He went on, not looking at her now, "I prefer to be frank with you. . . . We parted five years ago."

Katherine's eyes turned unconsciously to the child. Peggy's head had sunk to the outflung arm and from her parted lips came the deep, even breathing of sleep. That pause grew heavy. It seemed necessary to Katherine to say something, but everything that occurred to her she rejected as a stock formula of inadequacy.

Hesitantly at last she murmured, "Of course when people aren't happy—it's better to separate——"

"I'm divorced," said MacNare abruptly.

She said nothing.

He added, "I don't want any false pretenses. Truth isn't always simple but—here it is. . . . I made a thor-

ough young fool of myself. I married at twenty-three. That's a century ago—I'm thirty-two now. . . . We lived together three years. Then Peg was born. Before she was a year old I got my divorce. I took her to New York—then came here. We've been here nearly four years."

There seemed nothing in the world to say to that bald narrative. Phrases of it went snapping through the girl's head—*A thorough young fool—I got my divorce.* . . . Her sentimental notions of the man's tragedy went crashing. . . . From the chaos loomed dimmer and grimmer specters, dark outlines she could not apprehend. . . .

She thought, confusedly, that the Surly Man would probably be hard on a woman—especially a woman who had wronged him. . . . She looked at the child over whose unconscious head the story had been told and felt a pang of pity for the mother who had lost her.

From that pity sprang the unconsidered question, "Does her—mother—never see her?"

"Never."

He went on, biting off his words, "The one desire of my life is that her mother will never see her and that Peggy will never see her mother. And—if I live—it's safe enough to prophesy. . . . She," there was an odd, indescribably shading of the word, "she has married again."

"I'm glad," said Katherine, from a confusion of feeling.

A wry, mirthless grin flickered over a corner of that young-old mouth.

"So am I."

Determinedly he reapplied himself to his pipe. He had said all that he meant to say. Katherine could but faintly guess what it had cost him, yet now that it was done he felt a distinct relief.

As he sat there in the gathering dusk, silently smoking, he seemed to Katherine's pitying fancy to be some grim and forceful projection from the dark background that his words had painted for her. She thought she understood how dark it had been. . . . She thought it the old three-cornered tragedy, and wondered concerning that unknown woman over whom he had been such a "thorough young fool," that woman who had taken his youth and then flung it away. . . . She wondered—incurable sentimentalist!—if he still "loved" her. She thought it quite in keeping with his character that he should love and not forgive. . . . Then a consuming pity for him rose in her, a helpless sorrow for the brutalities of life.

And suddenly she felt herself a child, ignorant of passion, untried and unstirred by the deep terrible currents that sweep men and women to their fates.

Yet when he rose to go, without a further word, lifting Peggy gently and easily in his strong arms, she felt herself at the same time a very mother to him, longing to sooth, to assuage. . . . But to heal—that, she knew, was beyond such simple gifts as her friendship could bring to him.

"Good night," was all the word she had for him but her eyes spoke for her.

## CHAPTER XII

IT was some two weeks later upon a Saturday morning that Madame Bonnet unburdened herself of a few observations. She had eyes in her head, that shrewd madame, for other things than the studio which she was officiously setting to rights beneath MacNare's protesting nose. He always remained on guard to defend his possessions from this invasion of feminine cleanliness.

It was late June and warm and the north windows were wide to lure a most capricious breeze. The broad doors upon the side street had been opened, too, to admit the great block of marble for MacNare's fountain, which was now in the middle of the studio, mantled in heavy white cloths. MacNare was still struggling with the bolts and bars of the cumbersome doors, used only for his statues, and madame glanced once or twice tentatively at his back before she commenced her conversation.

"A wonderful day," she observed, her damp cloth vigorous upon a mantle top. "Not a day in which to be in Paris."

"I thought you were a good Parisian." MacNare

drove the last bolt home and grunted with satisfaction. Then he turned to eye her onslaught upon his mantle with disapprobation.

"And so I am a good Parisian. . . . But I was also a good country girl before I married Bonnet—God rest his soul!—and I have not forgotten how soft the air is at Les Buissons nor how the little stream runs through the meadow with the ducks floating on it. . . . My son's Marie has hatched out some fine duck's eggs," madame continued with a broad disregard of distinctions. "Now there are fat little ducklings ready for the oven. Monsieur must go down and taste them."

"Without a doubt," MacNare assented vaguely, beginning to sort his motley pipes upon a table next in the line of attack.

"And never will there be a better time than now!" madame enthusiastically proclaimed. "Why not this very day, monsieur? Marie does not need warning. Or monsieur can sleep at the inn and come to Marie's for dinner——"

"I thought that Marie——"

"That is not for three months. My son did not marry a weakling," said madame scornfully. "Marie would be glad of a lodger. And the country air would benefit monsieur. He has not the look of one who has the good appetite."

"Oh, tut-tut-tut! What should I do down in the country?" returned the sculptor irritably. "Madame understands that I do not paint pictures of fields in bloom nor make models of domestic hens."

"Monsieur could take a walk with mademoiselle."

"Eh?" MacNare stared sharply at the bland countenance of his landlady. "What mademoiselle?"

"The mademoiselle *là-dessus*." Madame rolled her eyes to the ceiling, her hands being occupied with the table top. "She went this morning. She had spoken of going before, and yesterday, seeing what weather it is, she came to me and asked me to telegraph Marie. She is to make pictures there for a week."

"And you propose that I should go this afternoon!" MacNare gave a hoot of a laugh. "Fie, madame, at your age!"

But he did not meet the look in her eyes. He began to fill the pipe nearest his hand, jamming the tobacco down hurriedly with those strong, blunt, marvelously sensitive fingers of his.

Madame shrugged and sent her cloth vigorously across the table, surveying its blackened folds with proper expressiveness.

"As to my age, it is one of good sense which monsieur apparently has not yet reached," she rejoined smartly, in the habitual frankness of years of association. "For monsieur to turn his back upon a mademoiselle with cheeks like apples and a heart of gold——!"

"I turn my back!" said the young man gruffly.

"Yes, yes, I have seen! For a time after the little one's illness affairs were pleasant. Then it was, 'Mademoiselle, come to the Bois this Sunday with us,' and 'Mademoiselle, take a walk' . . . but of late it is as if mademoiselle were Cain. When monsieur hears her coming he turns back into his room. If mademoiselle knocks when the little one is not here he does not answer—Oh,

I have heard! Ungrateful! Stupid!" madame hurled, her face pink with indignation. "It is not as if monsieur were a graybeard with a wooden leg that he could not lift his eyes to a young girl who knows no better than to think the good God sent her into the world to paint worthless women!"

MacNare had turned his back squarely upon madame. A dull, dark red was mounting higher and higher in his face, crimsoning the roots of his hair. It was not pleasant to a man of his temperament to find the feeling which he had refused to admit to the light of his own recognition being wantonly twirled, like an impaled butterfly, upon madame's observation.

And yet her last words struck a queer, forbidden pleasure into him which he denied.

He took his big chair and planted himself in it, eyeing her determinedly with an air of outfacing the enemy, and remarked in a rallying tone, "Do I look to you, then, a lover?"

She gave him the fleetest of glances, but so pointed with a shrewd feminine penetration that he felt his bravado disposed of on the instant. But he did not abandon his note of jocular scorn.

"And this advice from you, you who know so much of me! Why, I thought that you were a good Catholic and believed that once married, always married to the death!"

"Monsieur is not a Catholic."

"Do you then wish me in deadly sin?"

Madame came a little closer, her face a study. "Oh, as to being a good Catholic," she observed, with frank-

ness, yet also with embarrassment, "why so I hope I am. I hold with religion. It is necessary for the people. How else should one be baptized and married and laid in the ground? And the Church has its own rules—the Church is very wise. . . . Divorce is not seemly. It is hard enough, God knows, to get one good husband for a girl nowadays—there are not many young men like my Jean!—without having to get her a second. And if the first swallowed all the dowry what would there be for the second? And if a man could rid himself of a wife every time that the wind turned north—no, no, no!"

She shook her head vigorously. "But as for sucking in all that a priest says like mother's milk—why, I will tell monsieur. . . . When I was quite a girl, my father —God rest his soul!"—piously madame crossed herself —"my father took me to walk in the churchyard where we had laid a bead wreath upon the grave of a relation. 'Look you, Clotilde,' he said to me in confidence, 'you are my child; you are not an ordinary fool of a girl. As to mass and confession and the rest, it is the respectable thing, and will keep you a good girl, and there is nothing else for the people. But do not be deceived. Do not pay the priest instead of the doctor, nor waste yourself in candles for purgatory. When you are dead you go back into the earth, and it is the fresh seeds that rise from the earth in the spring, and not the fallen petals. If you would live again you live in the memory of just deeds and loving kindnesses!' "

She sighed deeply. "He was a shrewd man, my father, and the priest had great respect for him.

'When you are once dead,' he said that day, and never again did he open his mouth to me about it, 'you are dead a long time, and it is well to have lived while you live.' And so I say to you, monsieur, that when once you are dead you are dead, and it is well to live while you are young and not to sit in a room with a block of marble as if you were carving your own monument. . . . It was not worth the time of the good God to have blown the breath of life into your bones if you make no more use of it than this!"

Madame ceased to talk and applied herself to another side of the room.

MacNare's pipe had gone out. A little spark from its bowl was charring an undiscovered spot upon his cuff. From the open window the sounds of the summer streets filled the room but did not penetrate his mood.

He had thought himself done with women forever. Certainly one of them had shown him everything that was weakest and basest in the feminine heart. It was not that she had loved another. He was a man who could have risen above his own hurt and loss to understanding and compassion for another's tragedy and pain, but the iron that had entered his soul had been poisoned with a far more venomous barb.

The woman that he had married, in the first flush of a boy's infatuation for a beautiful face, had been a trifler as light as air, ignorant of worth or honor or truth, greedy for every cheap excitement, every easy praise or moment's passion that her beauty snared. She had been wild before she came to MacNare's little city, and met him, and she did not stay long in the

confines of that position and society which pleased her like a toy in the first months of their marriage. She was the talk of the little town, the occasion for many knowing winks and nods among the traveling men, before MacNare had his first hint of the truth, before he knew what her mysterious visits to "friends in the city" meant.

That was when Peggy was coming. But the child was his own. The very angle of her stubborn tiny baby jaw told him that. And the mother promised—what facile tears she wept, what hysterics, what appeals! And then—there was another traveling man, and MacNare took his baby and got a divorce.

It was the cheapness of it that was salt in his wounds, the galling, futile, sordid cheapness. To have given his heart to such slack and tawdry hands! . . . Well, she was married, to the last traveling man, and being of her fiber, it might be that he could hold her as he wished. For himself the marriage meant relief and security. He thought of her marriage with detachment, but the image of her brought always that sick nausea of memory. That once he had kissed her ropes of gold-brown hair, her rose-pink lips! A fool's passion! How he had grown to loathe her big eyes, with their trick of watching him out of their corners, her moist, red, always love-seeking lips.

Well, it had been a dose of the sex to last him a lifetime. But he had ignored his own youth. He had ignored the tremendous springs of life. . . . And then, when he had found himself turning to that girl from the States, with her clear true eyes, her innocent friend-

ship, her merry youth, how he had snatched himself back as if from the brink of the most disastrous folly!

His recoil was instinctive; it was the burnt flesh's memory of the fire. He had no desire to suffer again, no intention of playing the fool to a commendable, but hopeless passion. He shrank from even the sound of Katherine's light feet on the stairs. Sometimes he left his studio rather than listen to her quick footsteps overhead, or the soft soprano of her singing. He could see her too clearly there, the light on her yellow head, her gray eyes clear and shining, her lips just touched with that teasing little smile. . . .

That night he had told her of his marriage he had not owned to himself what motives prompted him to open the past to her. . . . But the hours that followed had been merciless in their revelations. And he had avoided her with almost resentful anger because she had the power to make him feel. . . .

And as he sat there drawing at his lifeless pipe, the deadening years slipped suddenly from him. He ceased to feel a hundred and thirty-two. . . . He thought of Les Buissons and the yellow of the grain in the fields that was like the yellow of Katherine's hair, and the blue of the little stream with the ducklings floating on its placid surface. He thought of the straight, white road that led to it, with the straight, green trees on each side, and he remembered a little hill, just beyond the farm . . . and the way that the country faded at twilight in the silver distance.

He rose to his feet, stretching his strong arms, and feeling the sense of power and vigor in his muscles.

"If I should go for the Sabbath," he remarked, endeavoring to infuse an air of gruffness into his voice, "it would be to escape thy foolish tongue. Can you have the little one ready by the morning train?"

He would have liked to go that evening but he considered the delay a last screen to his pride.

"For the morning train," assented madame. Being a wise woman she gave no sign of undue triumph. "Marie's little Jeanne will be glad to see her. They will have a fine time together in the fields. And she will find the little Thomas walking."

MacNare grunted, and became suddenly aware that the pipe in his mouth was cold.

"And for monsieur," continued madame evenly, with a scarcely perceptible glance in his direction, "something in the nature of a more suitable costume for the country—yes? Lighter for comfort and convenience. And if I should venture another suggestion it is that monsieur's cravats may well go now to tie his parcels and a new one, of perhaps, a blue, *not* a black, would be an acceptable reinforcement of his modishness!"

"Imbecile!" said MacNare with a scornful laugh. And he aired a new black cravat with the gray suit which he self-consciously wore home that afternoon. But there was a blue cravat in his pocket.

## CHAPTER XIII

A LONG, straight white road led to Les Buissons, shaded with tall trees, between whose sturdy trunks were glimpses of rich rolling fields and lovely woods. It was a pretentious road, but Les Buissons was not pretentious; it was an old gray-stoned place that seemed to have grown very cozily and compactly upon the bosom of the luxuriant countryside. Even the spires of the weathered church did not rise very high in their modest aspirations, but they were pleasant spires and not above a sense of companionableness.

The church was at one side of the square into which the single street of the village led from the white highway, where one descended from the train of infinite accommodation, and on the other sides were a town hall and a row of substantial little shops and an old inn and a new inn where "Garage" and "Petrol" displayed on commanding signs told of the inspiring frequence of motorists.

But it was not the shops and the inns that made Les Buissons; it was the little farms, those small, independent holdings that are the pride and glory of the French

tiller of the soil, and the backbone of thrifty France. Their red roofs were dotted all about the countryside, and the carefully tilled fields were squared off like checkerboards in the varying greens and golds. A little stream wandered fitfully about the edges of the village; at one place there was a mill, at another the flat stones where the women washed their clothes; and some distance away was the pool where the sheep were washed before the shearing.

The farm of Jean Bonnet—it was madame's farm, too, but having become addicted to the city in her husband's lifetime she still clung to Paris through her working days—was some distance beyond the village on the banks of this little stream, and not far from the straight highway. It was so trim and fresh-looking a little farm, so bright of color with its red tiles and its white-washed buildings, so clean with its scrubbed door stones and bright window-panes that its age was not even suggested until you passed the sunken door stones, under the worn lintel, into the wide, oak-paneled room.

Here the years had turned the oak to blackness save for the curious squares upon the wall opposite the casement window where the sunlight had bleached the wood to ivory pallor and one end of the long room had received additional darkening from the smoke of the great oven. Shining brasses and coppers gleamed about the oven, and old pottery ware added its charm of color to the shelves. It was ware of whose worth Marie Bonnet was proudly acquainted and to the occasional tourists, offering a franc or so for an odd piece which they averred had "happened to catch their fancy" she would

composedly remark, "But that is the pottery of the Vosges. See, madame, this is the mark of authenticity. It is not for two francs that one disposes of such."

Many of these pieces dated from the old times when there had been a grand seigneur in the château beyond the woods, not two tenant Americans, and the farm had been one of his possessions. It had been given to one of Madame Bonnet's ancestors for signal service in the chase, and had remained in her family through all the years. Little by little, self-denial had added to its tiny fields until it was indeed a farm of which to be proud.

Marie Bonnet met MacNare and Peggy at the door. He and his little girl had lodged with her several times, and she welcomed them now with a flow of hospitable regret that he had chosen to stop at the inn. It was true that the mademoiselle had the best room, overhead, but it was not as if there were not other places where he could be made comfortable. Did monsieur remember the time, in hot midsummer, when he had elected to sleep out on the hay, at the Inn of the Silver Moon?

And the little one! How glad she was that she had come! The child would be the better for country milk. The cow was giving splendidly now—there was a new calf, yes, and new pigs. Little Marguerite should behold them.

Quickly the woman busied herself in filling a blue bowl with yellow cream, and breaking off an end of a long loaf for the little girl who stood clinging to her young father's hands, staring about at the half-remembered room with dark, eager eyes.

MacNare was fidgeting like a boy in school. He had

been on a holiday ever since he and Peggy had taken the train early that Sunday morning, a holiday from his wonted self. He had yielded to the lure that was drawing him, and he felt young again, elated with the old sense of being ready for life, and equal to it. . . .

He drew a deep breath of the good country air and the faint flush of the sun was already coloring his pale skin. Marie, good woman, her mind running ahead to this addition to the midday meal and selecting the extra duckling to be dispatched, was not too occupied to note sympathetically that the monsieur was like a boy, and that a blue cravat became him.

She moved to call her husband and the two children but MacNare was already out the door again. With betraying eagerness under his assumption of ease he asked Marie where the mademoiselle was now. Out painting?

"Down the long road—to the hill beyond," Marie answered gesturing. "There is a view——"

"Let the little one stay here," said MacNare brusquely, and vanished.

The straight white road was hot and dusty, but on the edge of it, beneath the shade of the trees, there was a narrow path worn by generations of feet, bare or saboted, little active feet bringing home the geese or cows. Here MacNare tramped along, not in undue haste, savoring the day and his own mood.

The sky was very blue and filled with soft little clouds, floating slowly. Their shadows fell lightly as a bird's wing on the fields that the Sabbath had emptied of the busy workers. The rich smell of the fertile land came to

him and the fresh scent of growing things. It was still June but there was the breath of July's luxuriance in the air, the warm forerunner of harvest. The broad earth was sunning herself in happy anticipation. . . . Something of that same warmth was coursing through the man's veins. The happiness of the fertile earth communicated itself to him.

He had been a fool, he thought, to let one weak woman darken the face of this earth for him, and sour the taste of life to his tongue. . . . She had distorted love to him, like a bleared looking-glass, tainting and falsifying. Now he could think of her, with hard justice, but not with bitterness. He did not even regret that it had been, for it had given him Peggy, the child of his lonely heart—and it had given him, too a measure of deeper understanding for this other woman, this girl who had come so swiftly into his life.

If he had never known unfaith and tinsel lures and shameful calculation how could he have known the beauty of such simply sincerity as Katherine's, such innocent gayety and brave friendliness? He thought of Katherine with rare tenderness as he went on, not thinking of what he should say to her, not sure that he should say anything at all as yet, but only dwelling upon her image and glad to be going to her—conscious with all his faculties that he was going to her. She had surprised his nature and filled it with her own sunny youth. . . . He thought of her young friendliness to him, her ready trust, her saucy humor. He thought of the bright hair like daffodil-gold, and the fine sweep of it over her close-set ears; he thought of the lovely carriage of her head, its light

poise upon her slender neck, and the slim, strong lines of her young and buoyant body. She was the embodiment of springtime to him, of youth, clean, strong, light-hearted youth, innocent, tender, audacious.

With a deepening of his reverence he felt that it was perhaps well that he had suffered for now he would be wise and strong enough to guard her, if ever in the future she should grant that to him, so that the ugliness of life should never hurt her if he could help it. Not even the winds of heaven should visit her face too roughly, he thought, the phrase singing itself over and over in his mind.

The sun was high over his head, marking the noon, but in the shade of the path he took off his hat, letting the light wind ruffle his thick hair. The dust of the walk and of the journey was on his new gray clothes and he was glad; he felt drolly self-conscious to be coming to her in such fine array after all her daily knowledge of his rumpled garments and working blouses, and yet he was boyishly pleased. She would not think him a sloven.

He turned aside from the road to mount the hill, and as he did so Katherine's figure appeared at the top, silhouetted against the blue. She was not alone. Beside her, very close, was a tall young man, and her arm was slipped through his, and his other hand was laid upon hers in a gesture of intimacy. Her face was upturned to his, and her lips were moving in soft, laughing speech. He was smiling down upon her. And upon both their faces was the look that life wears only once in all its time.

MacNare stopped short. He did not stir and was standing as rigidly by the path as one of his own statues when Katherine caught sight of him and the color came rushing rosily to her pretty face. It was a day when her young blood was swift to stir.

With an accent of frank pleasure she called his name, and as he advanced and met them she presented him to the tall soldier at her side, who greeted him with the cordiality of an absent-minded god. It did not take more than one glance to see that this Captain Edgerton, from whose arm her hand had fallen, was a man in the very top-heaven of happiness.

His young face was shining as if a lamp were lighted back of his eyes. To MacNare, suddenly conscious of defeated years, the boy seemed victorious youth, handsome, happy-hearted, created for passion and vigor and triumphant love.

Bitterness surged sickeningly over him; it filled his mouth, his throat, his nostrils like a palpable taste. . . . The sudden eclipse of all tender expectation dashed a sense of suffocating despair into his very soul. He met his own pain with iron contempt for its deluded folly. He knew, now, that he was done with folly forever.

Meanwhile he was walking with them, and talking. At least he was answering Katherine's half-absent questions. It did not seem strange to her that MacNare had come, for Madame Bonnet had told her that often he went to the farm, and she chatted of him and his child to Edgerton with the kindness of an overflowing heart. Perhaps Edgerton, suddenly perceiving the vigorous

youth of this father of Peggy of whom she had written as of a graybeard, had his own thoughts, but he was too scrupulous to admit them. He could afford to feel a pang of pity for the dark-browed fellow who had stared so blankly at them.

They reached Marie's where the scent of the ducklings filled the air, and where Jean Bonnet and his two children in their Sunday best were waiting to greet him, but it appeared that MacNare could not remain for dinner. Peggy must get her hat and say farewell.

Marie was voluble in regret. Moving on to Armande? What, in the name of heaven, was there to interest a gentleman at Armande? Pigs and a bad smell pervaded that place—it was no village for a gentleman—and at dinner hour, also, with ducklings ready to pop into one's mouth!

Armande was but the first of a journey, he assured her. He and Peggy were upon a pilgrimage. It was for their health. . . .

And so he was gone, the child clinging tightly to his hand, desolated at being torn from the small Thomas and the black pigs, but shutting her lips, so like his own, over her griefs. For no more than an hour had he been at Les Buissons and for no more than an hour was he remembered by the girl he had gone to meet.

"I'm always so sorry for him!" she sighed to her lover.

He gazed into her radiant eyes. "I'm sorry for everybody else in the whole wide world, sweetheart."

She had come there to avoid Edgerton. She had con-

fessed that to him that morning when he had met her in the road, setting forth upon her trip to the hill.

When his letter had reached her, announcing that at last he was free to come to Paris for another week-end and asking her to wire if not convenient, she had hesitated and dallied until the last moment. And then sudden panic had sent winging the late reply that she was to be out of the city, for a week in the country, painting. Hurriedly that Saturday she had packed her things and fled to the daughter-in-law of whom madame had so often told her. It was sheer fright, scurrying for cover. She was afraid of him, of that steady intentness, that simple concentration of his. She told herself that she didn't know him, that he didn't know her, that it was too soon, that they were too young, that it was absurd to think that he meant anything and that she must be awaiting him as if *she* meant anything, and that she was too unsettled to decide anything at all. . . . And so she fled . . . like any mid-Victorian maiden, instead of a modern girl confronting her future with fearless eyes.

For just one second Edgerton had been balked by that telegram. But he was a young man who hated disappointments. Metaphorically he sprang into the saddle and made for the border. What he really did was to come straight to Paris, and finding that the studio building had no telephone he took a cab to it and inquired for Miss King of Madame Bonnet. Madame, believing him no more than a caller, replied that mademoiselle was out of town and gave her address. This happened Saturday evening, while MacNare was packing his bags.

Edgerton left on the evening train for Les Buissons.

He had no notion what manner of place it might be but if Katherine were there he was confident that he could find her. American girls with gray eyes and yellow hair were not so frequent as to be unnoticed in rural France.

His inquiries informed him of her presence at Jean Bonnet's, but it was late, for the train had not hurried in its extremely local character, so he had gone to the inn and slept the sleep of young and eager lovers—that is to say he had been awake half the night, not unhappily. And then he had slept so heavily and long, that though he had dashed through his *petit déjeuner* Katherine was just coming down the path into the road, her sketchbook under her arm when he met her.

Whatever misgivings the young man had had as to her reception of his audacity had vanished at that moment. Her starry-eyed surprise, the sweet color stealing into her cheeks, the hint of confusion—these unconscious signs banished every doubt that had battled with the happiness of his coming. His own face, though he did not know it, was shining.

They touched hands, then he took her sketching things from her, and together they turned into the road and walked side by side under the trees, and then climbed the hill where she set out her things and made a pretense of painting. But soon she gave up, with a confessing laugh, and they seated themselves in the long grass in the shade of the wide-branched trees, looking off into the sunny distances.

The air was sweet with the slow ringing of bells. On the road below them the country folk were coming in to church but from their point they could not see the road,

only the field and wood beyond, with the blue gleams of a winding river against the green-gray of more distant woods.

It was a day of tender warmth, of high heartbeats, of dreams that seemed to hover with gossamer wings like the bright butterflies circling about them. Small need for words on such a day. It was enough to be together. They shared a sense of something blessed and uplifting; of happiness in which the whole world seemed to take part. Whatever Power had made them had given them this.

He was looking at her with all his heart in his eyes, honest, unashamed, unbelievably tender. His hand in the grass was pressing close to hers. Suddenly he said huskily, "Ever since I've known you," and bent and pressed the back of her hand to his lips.

Then he lifted his head and looked down on her, and she saw the brightness of his eyes darken and grow grave with the question asked.

She sat very still, her hand lying in his, her eyes upturned, held by his. She was pale and her heart was beating unsteadily, shaken by a terrifyingly sweet surprise that was not at any suddenness in his touch or words, for these were the simple crystallization of the vague happiness in which she seemed to have been floating, but a surprise that it should all seem to her so simple, so natural, so inevitable.

The moment had brought its revelation and demolished at a touch her vagueness and her wistful hesitancies. The eyes that were lifted to him grew starry bright through their soft wonder. . . .

With a gesture infinitely tender he gathered her into his arms and held her close, his cheek pressed against hers one throbbing moment before his kiss touched her cheek and then her quivering lips. It was a shy, sweet passage of love that held their first kiss, so much of the reverent boy in him, so much of the unawakened girl in her.

And like two happy children in some enchanted wood, they lingered through unperceived hours, while the sun grew higher and higher overhead, and dancing gleams of sunshine dappled the fawn-colored shade.

Their talk, fitful and infrequent, ran at first upon their past, that short little past which had accomplished such tremendous miracles of things for them. He told her that he had fallen in love with her on the boat, but that he couldn't quite believe it, for he hadn't fancied himself the sort to fall in love with anyone.

"As if a chap knew himself in these things!" he said with a laughing contempt from his height of experience for that callow ignorance of yesterday. "But my chums have always chaffed me for being such an awfully thick-skinned sort that I'd come to believe them—fancied that when I married it would be some nice neighborly jog-trot affair, arranged by the Mammas. . . . I never dreamed of *this*."

His arm tightened about her as he spoke. Katherine leaned back against it and looked up at him with eyes that were brushed with laughing surprise.

"I'm afraid that there was some nice, neighborly girl in the background that you *did* dream of!"

The fresh color rose high under his bronzed skin.

"But I didn't dream." He hesitated, uncomfortably. "You see, dearest, it's not very easy to talk about. It sounds as if I were fearfully conceited. But I've always fancied—you know how Maters look out for one?"

Katherine, remembering her unworldly and improvident mother, tempered her assent with reservation.

"Well, there is a very sweet little girl next place to ours—we were rather fond of each other as kids. And later I imagined, Oh, from nothing on the girl's part, you know——"

"That wasn't true," thought Katherine with inner conviction.

"It was Mater rather put the idea in my head, just because she wished it, I fancy, and so, as there was nothing at all in it, I kept out of the way. I've only been down to the Hall once this spring—when I took those snaps I brought you. Remember? Now next week I have to go down—it's Mater's birthday—and that was one of the reasons I couldn't let your telegram put me off. It had been impossible to get away to you before, and I had to see you before I went down and have something definite to go on."

He added, his voice a happy boy's, "And for my long leave, the end of next month, you'll come to the Hall, won't you darling? Mater will write you, of course."

"But—but you're not going to tell her—at once?"

Katherine sat up very straight, a yellow elf-lock tumbling over a flushed cheek, her gray eyes round with ingenuous wonder.

"Of course."

"But—it's so fearfully sudden! I can't imagine what my own mother will say!"

"When she sees me?" The Captain chuckled.

"Oh, I'm not worrying about *that*," she conceded with fond pride. "It's what she'll say before she sees you—when you're just a vague, unknown English officer."

"I know." He looked concerned. "It is pretty abrupt for her. I've thought about it. But your friends—these Whartons?—those very charming souls on the boat, they know your mother don't they? And they will write and reassure her that I'm not a fearful cut-throat, and you can have your friends investigate me, you know. And I assure you, darling," he declared, "that I can stand any amount of investigation!"

Katherine smiled vaguely, tucking up her blowing hair, confused with sudden thoughts of her mother, and of the Whartons' surprise, after their warnings of the Captain's "caste."

"It all sounds very far away," she murmured.

"Far away! Dear girl, aren't you to marry me in six months?"

"Six m——?"

She let her hair alone and stared at him, her lips parted.

"I know that dates are the bride's prerogatives," he smiled, "but you aren't averse to suggestions, dear? Of course, if you can be ready in three——"

"Why, I can't be *married* for years and years!" Katherine gasped.

He put a strong arm about her and drew her back to his shoulder again.

Presently she admitted, "Well—next summer, then. Next—summer."

"I'll come for you at any time. But it seems to me that spring——"

She murmured, "My poor mother."

"She won't like your living in England?"

"Of course not." And she added, her lips curving, "And I won't, either.

Said the Captain confidently, "Wait till you've seen it."

"It doesn't matter. If it were as horrid as India——"

"Would you, my darling?"

With such interruptions the conversation did not proceed rapidly. But by and by an ordered plan came out of the incoherence. Instead of his announcing it at once, as it was his frank young intention to do, and having her invited to the Hall during his leave the last of July and the first of August, they would wait until his leave, and then she would come to London with the Whartons, who, she remembered, were providentially scheduled to appear among the English cathedrals at that time. Then he could come and see her, and she would meet his mother in a less trying way than plunging down to the Hall for a visit, and then everything could be announced, both to his side and to hers.

The Whartons were to sail for America the last of August, and their personal word would allay her parents' anxieties. "Though, of course," she worriedly mentioned, "even their glowing account of you isn't going to make England any nearer to mother."

"But you can go often to her, dear, and with your

father's long vacations—he's a professor, isn't he?—he and your mother can come often to you."

"You don't know a professor's salary," said the girl with a whimsical smile for the intrusion of rueful practicalities into the idealism of the hour, "nor the cost of living in the great American Republic—and supporting our millionaires and trusts! However—we'll manage."

As for the immediate future—and the young man kept a very commanding eye upon that—it was finally agreed that she would return to Paris for a time—"Where I can get over to see you," he declared, with a shameless disregard for the claims of art—and then, abridging that year of work, she would return just before Christmas to America, so as to have at least six months at home before he came for her in June.

It seemed very unreal and dreamlike, as they planned it there on the hilltop, and yet—he had such a way of making dreams come true! How dream-like he had seemed to her memory, those first days in Paris, and yet how real and how vivid he was now—more near and dear than anything in the world. Her eyes kept turning to him with that touching look of soft and happy wonder. She hardly knew what had been happening to her.

But what had happened was so clearly written in her face that MacNare had not needed to look twice.

## CHAPTER XIV

IT was a day of enchantment.

At the farm Katherine presented the Englishman to Marie Bonnet's astonishment—Marie was already in a sentimental excitement over the appearance of MacNare and his strange haste to find the mademoiselle—and Jeffrey Edgerton, believing it more seemly to establish his status, had made the first announcement of his betrothal in that ancient farmhouse to these unknown French folk.

There was something idyllic in the rustic quality of the scene that touched the fancies of the young lovers. The long, dark, low-ceiled room, the sunshine sparkling through the tiny casements upon the table spread with Marie's whitest linen and the brightest of the old pottery, the open door through which inquiring hens wandered, the shining, rosy faces of the little children, were all delighting to the girl's pictorial sensitiveness.

They dined upon the ducklings that were fit to pop into the mouth of an archangel as the merry Jean declared, and afterwards Jean, his French blood stirred by the romance of these newcomers to his hospitable roof, descended to his tiny cellar and returned

with a cobwebby bottle of the vintage of the last seigneur wherein to drink the health of mademoiselle and *le capitaine*, if they would graciously permit.

And Katherine, touching glasses half shyly, felt the first stir of womanly possessive pride as she saw how Jeffrey's unconscious charm, his boyishness over his direct, manly authority, had captivated already those simple but shrewd folk.

Afterward the young people had another walk and talk, in the heart of the dreamy afternoon, and later they climbed their hill again, while the long twilight died into the first faint starlight, and the magic of evening turned the world to fairyland.

Life, in that hour, seemed to hold its cup brimming at her lips. Older than the seigneur's vintage, she tasted of the very wine of miracle.

Silvery and remote the fields lay at their feet, with the soft white gauze mists stealing over them. The woods looked far and shadowy; the distant river revealed itself in pale and fugitive gleams. . . . How high above the world she seemed, with Jeffrey at her side. . . . And his eyes upon her, those dear, blue eyes with their look of love and power, their strong, "Trust me," to her every sense. She knew that she would answer that look as long as her heart had strength to beat.

And that night, as she lay in Marie Bonnet's rosemary-scented linen sheets, with the starlight stealing in the casement, and the scent of the hay mingling with the breath of the night, she lived that hour again, and her heart was very humble in its joy. . . . Through all

the chances of the world love had come to her, a splendid love, a love to which one could give one's life in honoring. And she was grateful that she had been true to herself, to those deep instinctive cravings that had spoken of high and stirring things so that she had kept her heart free and her life unfettered to answer the clear call when it came.

Also it seemed very wonderful to her that Jeffrey Edgerton should love her as he did. She was not too young to feel the rarity of that pure, romantic impulse in him that had brought him to her, undelayed by considerations of a more worldly choice, but it was not that he had yielded to his love as that she should have awakened it that made her heart beat fast and her cheeks flush in the darkness of that happy night. Her feelings were beyond anything that she had known, anything that she had divined that she could know. All things that were in her, heart and soul and mind and body, were united like a single flame in that altar fire of her devotion.

## CHAPTER XV

KATHERINE returned from Les Buissons upon Wednesday, not waiting to stay her week, feeling each day of importance now in those classes where her time was to be so abridged. And knowing that Marie would inevitably write to her mother-in-law of the English officer who had appeared upon that Sabbath, making his revelations, she showed Madame Bonnet his picture, one day in her room, with a brief statement.

"*Ma foi!*" said madame amazedly, and then promptly expressed many graceful wishes for the mademoiselle's happiness. "Eh, Mary, Mother of God, what have I done!" ran her inner ejaculations. And, a suitable time having been devoted to the mademoiselle's happy prospects, she recurred casually to the ones at Les Buissons, and inquired if Monsieur MacNare had appeared at the farm. She had urged him to take the little one there for her health.

And Katherine answered simply that he had come but did not stay; she thought he was making some sort of a tour.

"A tour of Purgatory," said madame's inner self with conviction. And she wondered, with a flame of re-

sentment against self-absorbed youth, wrapped in the chrysalis of its own affairs, what Heaven had given the girl such large clear gray eyes for, if it was not to see through a grindstone. . . . And why had the girl, her heart gone to an absent Englishman, been so lavish of herself with the American? Did she think he was of marble like his own statues? Did she think that lonely men were made to contemplate pink cheeks and bright eyes and hear merry laughter every day of the calendar and not reach a hand for them?

Apparently that was Katherine's frame of mind. She did have an uncomfortable qualm or so about MacNare's abrupt withdrawal from the farm, believing that if he had found her unoccupied and ready to share her time with him, he would have stayed companionably on. But she did not dream that he would have wanted of her more than friendliness. She merely thought that the contrast between her evident happiness and his own marred life was painful for him.

For two weeks MacNare and Peggy were away. And then one night they were back, Peggy browner and healthier than of yore, with dusty clothes and shabby boots and an epic of narrative, concerned with intimate detail of four-legged beasties for she had a farmer's heart, and MacNare leaner, grimmer, more taciturn than ever. Between madame and himself not one word was ever exchanged concerning that ill-omened expedition of his.

But Katherine, believing that madame would communicate the fact of her engagement, and aware, too, that he could not have been unperceptive of her evident relation

to Edgerton, though their enlightening remarks to the Bonnets had been made after his departure, felt that she really ought to make some reference to it so he would not feel that her friendship was not being frank with him. Indeed, so overflowing was her heart with it, that it was hard not to tell all her world—desperately hard not to write it in those letters of hers home.

But there she knew it would cause pain and apprehension. "John," her mother would say tragically, "we've let that goose of a girl go off painting—and she's engaged herself to an unknown Englishman. What shall we do?"

And she could hear her father's unrevealing reply, "Do? She seems to have done enough herself. Just what does she say?"

And then they would go over and over it, worrying, unsettled, confronting the grief of losing her, and the anxieties of her choice.

No need of perturbing them now. In a month, when they would soon see the Whartons—when she had grown more used to this new state of things. It was one thing to reveal the happiness of her engagement and another to go into all the plans that must ensue.

Nor could she tell her mother very well until Jeffrey had told his, and that announcement she had absolutely prohibited until they should meet in London.

The opportunity of speaking of it to the Surly Man did not occur immediately. He was working like a demon upon that fountain of his, and when they met the conversation did not flow into channels of intimate revelation. The most of his remarks were ireful com-

ments upon models. Katherine reminded herself that her small concerns were a very negligible factor in his interests, and that however she might have occasionally served to fill some of the gaps in his solitary life for him, he probably did not remember her existence when the flame of his genius was kindled in him.

In which she was utterly deceived. For into the woman of his Fountain of Life MacNare was pouring the buoyancy and the young gladness of the girl he secretly loved and his passion touched the face in marble with the light which was denied to shine upon him. And many a night, his head bent in his hands, he sat motionless by the open window, while from above floated down the soft strains of the Croatian song that Katherine loved so much.

" 'Live—live—live, the sun and stars shall light
you—' "

But it was the second verse that she sang oftenest now.

" 'Love, love, love, some magic glance befall you,
Love, love, love, some magic whisper call you,
Love, love ,love, some magic touch enthrall you.' "

And then in a little shower of happy notes the gay little love song from "Carmen" would come down to him, or the plaintiveness of old ballads. But it was always of love that she sang.

And he who had called, "Pas de chanteuses" after his

first glimpse of her back, sat and listened, his windows wide to catch every faint and delicate note.

She was not working much those days. Her dream possessed her. And as her dream concerned first of all that visit to London, happily arranged with the Whartons, and that visit meant luncheons and teas and dinners and drives and pretty frocks, her errant feet led her past windows of alluring hats and witching gowns, and her wistful eyes were full of chiffons and modes and linens and practical calculations.

Since she was not to stay the year out she could draw more deeply upon the sum put aside for that year, a sum derived from part of a small legacy and from a prize competition for a magazine cover—the prize against which Dick Conrad's resentment had burned bitterly. And since when one is young and in love and Paris frocks are *à l'occasion* it would be a sin not to be beautiful for one's beloved, the girl's thoughts and fingers were more often occupied with *ninon* and lace than with her paints and brushes. But she did adhere determinedly to the morning classes, which met now in a garden of the substitute teacher's home.

The sunshiny gladness of her mood fell brightly upon Etienne de Trézac. Even in those short months her French had grown supple and quick, and was pliant enough now for her jesting humor to meet his own turns of raillery. This developed a habit of chaffing intimacy which she greatly enjoyed, for one cannot live entirely upon dreams and the society of the two strenuous and elderly American art teachers, who like herself were staying on in Paris during the vacation time.

One night she and Etienne dined, "Dutch treat" as she always insisted, except upon some special occasion, at one of the little restaurants upon the left bank, and then were tempted into a rambling walk by the loveliness of the summer night, which seemed to hang upon them like a sweet-breathing, impalpable presence.

They were both silent, Katherine's thought so given to Jeffrey that it almost seemed as if he were walking at her side. The beauty of the night without him made her heart ache, but when she thought that in a little time now, the very end of this same month, he would be with her again, why then her pulses seemed to sing in their light beating.

At the door of the studio building Etienne, his manner oddly irresolute, asked if he might come up.

"For the space of one last cigarette," he said lightly. "I have the blue-moon hunger to-night—you would not cast me off to it?"

"For just a little then," said Katherine uncertainly. It was not really too late for a call, but she wanted to be alone and write to Jeffrey while the words that the night had brought her were still brimming in her heart. But her good-humor was too pliant.

In the studio she smilingly offered Etienne the matches for that cigarette and then took off her white hat, lifting the flattened hair with ruffling fingers, while the young man stood watching her, his dark eyes intent, then she drifted aimlessly to her table and sat down to sorting its decidedly overtaxed capacities. A basket, brimming with a tangle of lace, brought a faint smile to her lips as she tidied it.

"How you are beautiful to-night!" said De Trézac suddenly, with honest sincerity. "You are always pretty—but this summer you have bloomed like a flower. Perhaps it is the Paris air," he added, recapturing his old note of raillery.

"Then it is a pity that I am to leave," she smiled, and wondered what Jeffrey thought about this matter. Never, she recalled, had he paid her one of those compliments supposed to issue from a lover's lips. Even the Surly Man had once dryly granted her "a degree of pulchritude." Well—perhaps Jeffrey didn't like her looks. Perhaps he preferred brunettes. Perhaps it was her soul he loved, or her intellectual sobriety. She felt in her heart the soft laughter of a secure and happy love.

"To leave Paris?" De Trézac said, with sharpness.

"Not forever! But I think I shall take a vacation—and see London."

"A vacation in England—an anomaly! There one does not relax. Oh, you should not do that," he said quickly.

He added, rising suddenly and moving restlessly around the room, "But you are right—here it is too hot. Impossible to work! The city air—the pavements—the dust. . . . I will tell you. . . . You have never been to Normandy?"

"I have never been anywhere in Europe but here."

"You should see Normandy. And what better time? . . . I will tell you. . . . I know a place—no crowds, no tourists, but the sea and the great rocks— Ah, yes you should go there for your vacation, yes?"

She said absently, faintly surprised by his odd enthusiasm but too preoccupied with her own thoughts for attention, "Oh, I know Normandy is lovely, but——"

"Lovely? It is a heaven upon earth—when one brings the essence of heaven with one! . . . Ah, you will come with me? Yes? I will manage. I will take every care——"

She whirled about in her chair, just as he stooped to bend over her. His face, close to her own, was alight with his strange excitement; his dark eyes were glowing.

She thought amazedly, "Why—why, he is *perfectly mad!* . . . He's *insulting* me!"

It seemed to be absolutely preposterous. She could have smiled at such a word in connection with herself.

Aloud her voice was saying coldly, "What in the world are you talking about?"

Her cool crispness was arresting, even to an ardor abandoning its leash. An instant wariness leaped in his eager eyes; he looked at her with uncertain calculation beneath his smile.

"You do not understand? . . . But it is very simple."

Then a surge of feeling drove him toward her again. "Ah, you make me quite mad for you! Be a little kind, Katherine, and do not play any longer with me. . . . Just a little holiday . . . in Normandy——"

His hurried words stopped. She had drawn frigidly back from his eager approach and taken a few steps from him into the room, where she paused and looked at him with calm-eyed assurance. She was feeling a cold disgust, a bitter impatience at his stupidity.

"I wonder if you have any idea how absurd you are, Etienne?" she said very clearly.

"Absurd? But why?" His expression concentrated on her own.

"To say such things to me." She was still very quiet and clear-voiced. Intuitively, with the rush of enlightenment, she understood that he would laugh at heroics of moral indignation. Her scornful amusement was her only weapon. "It is as droll as if a tourist to whom one had been pleasant urged your sister to fly for a vacation with him! I had not thought you so dull. Must you see the background of society, the chaperonage of mother and father, to appreciate one's quality and one's position in the world?"

An ironic smile edged his handsome lips. "That is a little too strong," he returned, endeavoring to reflect her calm, but with the betraying color burning hotly in his cheeks. "What 'position in the world' am I to assume for one who makes Olga Goulebeff her intimate?"

"Olga! What is wrong with Olga? She is a comrade, a fellow-student——"

"And the very good friend of Louis Arnaud! When she told you of her vacation in the Alps, the winter sports, the games, did you not know who took her there, who—?" He laughed disagreeably at the blank stare she gave him.

"I don't believe it," she flung back. "I don't believe——"

"As you will." He shrugged airily, finding himself growing master of the situation. "But as for me, *I*

*know.* Louis is not alone in his conquest! To everyone the right of solace in neglect!"

She thought his laugh was the most hateful thing that she had heard in her life.

"And you can boast—that is your code!" she said furiously, feeling herself in defensive league with her sex against his dominant one. "Ah, poor Olga!"

"Poor Olga! And you never knew—you never suspected?" He stared hard at the unbelievable innocence of her gray eyes. Then softly he whistled and snapped his fingers.

"*Tiens!* . . . What was I to think? . . . You and Olga, together. . . . And you played with me—" He whirled about on her suddenly, and his eyes grew hot and angry again. "Can you pretend that you have not seen—not permitted one to believe? What was it that you were thinking, in the name of Heaven? Oh, you knew, you were content to have me follow you, to smile at me, to accept, to kindle—and you thought to hold me at a distance forever! That is the American way, then? You would practice on me, amuse yourself, be cool while I—I—Name of a Name, but you Americans are either the greatest fools on earth or the greatest cheats! . . . You would play the game but you do not risk the counters."

"You were—I thought you were—my friend!" She gave back, and flinched at his laugh.

"And did you think that that was all I would desire to be—I whom you permitted to see you alone, to dine with you, to smile into your eyes . . . to talk to you of myself, of my most sacred dreams—but you under-

stood what was growing within me. It is impossible to be so blind. My words, my actions——"

"I thought—you were gallant—that your real liking made a pretense, perhaps, and play of compliments you did not feel——"

She faltered, and he made a sound of mingled disgust and unbelief.

"Pretense! . . . Compliment! For a pretense do I waste my time, do I put myself at the service of a girl who——"

Very suddenly the color came back into her pale cheeks, and very suddenly and sharply she flung back her head, with that oddly boyish gesture of defiance instinctive to her moments of emotion.

"I have been used to American men," she uttered.

"Are they blocks of wood?" he interposed, with impertinence.

"They are men of honor, and their friendship for a girl is very real. And if they grow to be more than friends, they do not talk nonsense about vacations, like the villains in the theater. They are honorable men," she insisted broadly, like Anthony of his Romans.

"In their own class of life," said Etienne de Trézac, very amiably. "But—did you imagine that I was seeking my future countess?"

In a society where chivalric custom had sheered mankind of its pointed clarity of speech to the other sex, however unchivalricly its masculine behaviors may veer beneath the veil, Katherine had not known such taunts could be endured. And the bland presentation of his

assurance of her social inequality was gall and wormwood to her proudly democratic soul.

She was silent, and her silence was not unreceptive of new impressions and adjustments. . . . Even in her stinging mortification she was not unconscious of various truths in his position.

She uttered chokingly, "It is impossible for us to discuss—" and then her pride came stoutly to her aid. In a voice that sounded creditably like her own, "For we could never understand each other," she continued. "However impossible I might be to your society as a future countess, you would be just as impossible to mine, and I should be making myself absurd, and cheap, if I were to consider marrying a foreign count . . . you do not know how the Americans laugh at the millionaires' daughters who bought your titles! But that is the very reason," she went on quickly, "just because our lives were so different, that I thought it was interesting to be friends, and thought that our friendship was perfectly safe, because we could neither of us be more to each other than friends."

Her French began to stumble and hesitate. She was conscious of a reaction of horrible weariness that threatened to leave her weakly stranded, without having made a harbor. Determinedly she rallied her forces and her language.

"It did not occur to me that you could think—anything else."

He looked at her out of the corners of his eyes, then gazed down into the cigarette case which he had drawn out, and made a careful selection.

"The misunderstanding seems to have been unanimous," he remarked softly.

Applying a match he added, "Observe, mademoiselle, the villain in the theater always smokes a cigarette."

"And makes a low bow at the door," she supplemented with a wan smile. . . . Most unaccountably and uncontrollably her knees were trembling under her and she felt a supreme desire to sink down into the nearest chair. And then she saw that the hand which was resting upon the back of the chair by her was distinctly quivering and she tried desperately to control it, proudly afraid he would read her excitement for weakness.

"I accept the suggestion," murmured De Trézac, and moved to the door with his lightest grace of carriage. It occurred to her that the honors were even. If he had discredited himself in her eyes, he had certainly retaliated with a few home truths implanted unforgettably in her pride.

"Adieu—to our understanding," he smiled, made his low bow with a flourish and was gone.

It was when she stood before Jeffrey Edgerton's photograph that the full tide of shame rose over her. That such a thing could happen to his betrothed! . . . She felt dishonored, cheapened. . . . She could feel in the leap of his anger against De Trézac an edge of wounded amazement for herself. . . . Never would he fully understand. . . . Never would he need to understand.

She knew that the episode was buried in her consciousness with such a millstone of shame tied to it that no tidal storm could bring it to the surface.

## CHAPTER XVI

ONE factor of the situation remained for her to deal with—Olga. To be sure she had not seen much of Olga lately, but their manner to each other had long been of a casual intimacy. And now . . .

Olga was not at classes the next two days but upon Sunday morning she came early to Katherine's studio, with rolls and butter and strawberries under her arm, to breakfast in the room.

"But I am to have breakfast in the crémerie with Robert MacNare and his little girl," said Katherine. It was an engagement made that instant, but she was familiar with Surly Man's hours and habits.

"Then I will eat while you dress, lazy one," said Olga, and began to brew her own coffee.

As she dressed Katherine stole a troubled glance or two at the other girl. It was a problem beyond her powers. She was conscious of a sudden repugnance for the sight of Olga's little laughing mouth, and her secretive eyes, yet the repugnance was touched by a queer pity.

Olga turned briskly and found Katherine's eyes upon her.

"How you stare! Is it my earrings? Do you not like them?"

Her attention drawn to them Katherine found herself far from liking them. The huge pearls that formerly would have easily seemed to her a part of Olga's foreignness became significant of falsity, commonplace and cheap. She shook her head shortly.

"You are too young for them."

A moment later she added, "Have you heard from Louis Arnaud?"

Olga continued to eye the boiling coffee, then she looked up with deliberate fixity of expression. "Now why do you ask?"

"Olga, why weren't you frank with me?" blurted Katherine. The other girl's face did not change. It seemed to solidify its expression of blank interrogation, to grow rigid and fixed like a mask. Her little eyes were very still.

"What do you mean?"

"About Louis. About what you were to each other. If—if that is true. . . ."

Something flickered behind those set eyes and then was gone.

"So someone has been talking of me," said Olga, in intense disdain. "You listen to scandal—yes?"

Katherine felt wretchedly that she had made a miserable botch of things in the beginning. Indeed she did not know what she had expected to accomplish. But the old relation had become impossible for her, and she had made a blind rush toward the truth.

"Who was it?" said Olga fiercely.

Katherine was silent.

"And you believe—what is said by someone you dare not name?"

"I don't know what I believe."

"Was it Etienne?"

"Does it matter who said it? If only it isn't true——"

"Etienne—I suppose that it would be he!" Katherine saw Olga's breast heave stormily, yet her features were unchanged in their stony wariness.

"Yes, it was he," said Katherine with desperation. "And if it isn't true, Olga, outface him and deny it!"

Olga sat watching her a moment, then she gave a bitter laugh.

"And if I do would you believe me?"

"Yes," said Katherine heavily, and disbelieved herself.

"And if it were true you desire to see no more of me——?"

"If—if I can help you, Olga, you know I will. I——"

"Help!" Olga's sneer was something that Katherine remembered for many a day with a sense of her own inadequacy. "What do you call help?"

"If you need money," Katherine faltered, "you could come here to me for a time——"

"Shelter for the Magdalene." Decidedly there was a terrible spirit loose in Olga Goulebeff that morning. In another mood she might have met Katherine with denial, with mockery, with reassurance. Now she was possessed by a fury of insolent and indifferent contempt.

"*Grand merci*, but I need neither a bed nor a sermon!

And I have no explanation to make to *you!* Whatever you think of me and Louis . . . it is not my concern. I will make no answer to such impertinence. Tell Etienne de Trézac that from me. And as for yourself and Etienne——"

"I have been very foolish to go about so much with him," said Katherine swiftly. "And perhaps you have been only foolish, Olga. . . . Do stop then, and turn your back on them. You have talent. You can make a name for yourself. And some day you will meet a man worth while——"

"My talent!" The little Russian snapped her fingers. "You have seen for yourself what that is! A straw! I might make a drawing mistress in a provincial school —if I had the references. And my life—what is it? My father's people cast me off. He was above my mother. And my mother's people—country dullards from whom she ran away to come to Paris! . . . What friends have I? . . . But I am a fool to talk. . . . Do not think I admit anything. . . . I despise your lies. But you can clear your own skirts."

She pushed the food before her sharply away and turned from the table.

Katherine, buttoning her blue linen frock with shaking fingers, felt a terrible pity.

"Do not go—just because I must hurry away," she stammered. "Sit down and eat your breakfast."

Olga stared at her a moment. "Eh, very well," she said at last coolly, and sat down again at the table. But her eyes returned stealthily to Katherine.

At the door Katherine paused. She wanted to add

something definite to the futile inadequacy of the interview, to say something friendly and kind and bracing. Her feeling of indignation against the girl was gone, lost in a new comprehension and sorrow. She was too innocent of realities to feel the full sordidness of the revelation. But she could think of nothing to say. Olga's manner made her feel herself an intrusive fool.

"Good-by," she said at last, in a strained voice, with lowered eyes, as if hers were the disgrace, and "Good-by," returned Olga with hard brilliance, reapplying herself to the rolls.

But when the door had closed Olga leaned back from her pretense of eating, and sat very still, one hand on her throbbing throat.

In the crémerie, at the table where Katherine joined MacNare and Peggy, the girl's anxieties could not be repressed.

It seemed to her notions of American responsibility that she ought to "do" something, something helpful and decisive, but she felt utterly at sea.

"How can one help?" she begged of MacNare, with incoherent suddenness breaking one of their companionable silences. "There's a girl, a girl at the school—a friend of mine, too. And I find she's been—she isn't—I mean she's rather gay—very gay and rash and wild and —and wicked. And yet—I think she was in love with him and hoped. . . . Anyway she's all alone, and I'm afraid that she's going on drifting and drifting. She hasn't enough ambition for anchor, and there isn't one to whom she matters. And I—I've said all the wrong

things to her, and—and I don't know what the right things are. If I could only do something——"

"Does she want you to help?" said MacNare briskly, buttering his roll.

"No—no. It isn't that. But—what *is* going to become of her?"

"Several things," said the young man coolly, handing Peggy the roll and taking another for himself. Something in his tone made Katherine remember with a start that another such girl had found being his wife one of the things that she could compass. "And all of them beyond your power of interference," he went on.

"But I seem like—like a wretch to cast her off——"

MacNare looked shrewdly at the girl's flushed cheeks and troubled eyes, as she sat staring into the ugliness of this tragedy.

"Does she want to cling to you to draw herself out of the mud," he asked, "or to lend herself countenance in her indulgence? That's one question. And another—can you undertake the duties of permanent prop? . . . Nonsense. Everyone has to stand on his own feet. It's grim gospel, but it's the only one that will save the world. The only pilgrim worth salvage is the kind that climbs his hill himself—not gets lugged there on some poor John Christian's back. That isn't saying that we shouldn't make every allowance in our judgments," he added with unexpected gentleness.

"But—but can't we help?"

"Help? Sometimes. Sometimes not. 'Character is destiny,' you know, and you can't create character. You can't even legislate it," he added, sardonically,

"though the American legislatures seem trying to do that—for the other fellow."

Conscious of Peggy's eyes fixed anxiously upon him, he raised his coffee to his lips, and the child, with a relieved sigh, promptly applied her thirsty little lips to her milk.

Katherine sat silent.

"Help? How do you think you can help?" he shot at her with sudden irritability.

But that was just what nonplussed her. "Perhaps —if she had plenty of good companionship——"

"Meaning yours?"

With a ghost of a smile she nodded.

"Hasn't she had it all summer? And can you honestly share your life with her now, your friends? And don't flatter yourself that anything less than sharing counts. Condescension isn't help. It's salt on the raw. . . . Nonsense. Your business isn't to go about fraternizing with wavering virtue. Your business is to live your own life beautifully, which will be helpfully, and to paint strong, true, beautiful pictures that will take the seal from people's eyes and hearts——"

He stopped, balking at the first hint of eloquence. He added very slowly and gruffly, his eyes turning to that signet ring on her finger which Jeffrey had placed there until the London visit, "Besides—there's more to consider. . . . Hasn't that English captain friend of yours something to say about this?"

It was the first mention of Edgerton between them since the encounter at Les Buissons. Katherine felt the self-conscious color rise in her face. She had

wanted this opportunity, but now she met it constrainedly. "Yes, I suppose he has."

"Well, he'd tell you to wait a few years for your missionarying. . . . You'll find plenty of chance to be quite broadminded enough to suit him in years to come."

"He's not narrow-minded," flashed Katherine.

"But he's not fool enough, either, I hope, to want you to make yourself a public target for the sake of a senseless girl." The Surly Man bit quite savagely into the crust of his roll. "Remember that in Paris you will find a practically unlimited field for such talents!"

"You make me feel a great goose," said Katherine, with a rueful laugh.

"That's good. A woman who feels herself a fool isn't so likely to be making one of herself that moment. . . . Don't marmalade your napkin, Peg, it isn't becoming. . . . How soon does your Académie reopen?"

"Not till September."

"And you've given yourself one year for your study here?"

"I—I don't think I shall stay that year out." Somehow it took courage to say that. And she did not meet his eyes. Perhaps her subconscious self knew a little more than that surface girl admitted. "I think I'll go home for Christmas."

"Homesick?"

"N-not exactly."

"Funds out?"

"No. They're all right. . . . But—but if I'm to leave my mother rather soon for good——"

Still she did not look up. And the pause between

them seemed freighted with some heavy significance. She could not have told why she felt so reluctant about this telling him, now that it came to the point.

He made a gruff sound of comprehension. Presently he said, "Before Christmas?"

Peggy raised her head quickly. "*I* had a Christmas," she said eagerly. "I did—an' I had a doll and another doll, and a bed for a——"

"And what becomes of the career?"

"Oh—that? That goes on, forever and ever as long as I do," said Katherine with sudden relieved gayety. "There will be lots of chance to study afterwards——"

Under his dark brow his gaze rested on her a long moment in silence, then he said sharply, "See that there is! For if it is the real thing you can never bury it alive—it will be like a living child struggling for birth. Mind you, I don't say that you are a genius—but you have a spark. . . . And what does he say to it, your Englishman?"

"He never said anything to it for he hadn't looked at it, not till last week," returned Katherine merrily. "And then I sent him a sketch I made after he left Les Buissons, and he thinks it's very, very wonderful—and I must exhibit it in the Academy when I come to London."

"Ha!" MacNare gave his bark of a laugh. "Paint a pair of Airdales or a little boy in a lace collar and send it in." Then the sardonic hardness of his eyes softened as they rested on the girl's look of touching happiness.

"Never mind—just so you do your dogs well," he

conceded, "with not too noble eyes. . . . And I'm very glad you are so happy. It's probably the best thing in the world for you. He—he looked a very fine sort."

"Oh, he *is* a fine sort," she instantly agreed, with the radiance on her eyes and lips. "The very *finest* sort."

MacNare, looking at her with that dark-browed gaze, so unrevealing of the stark, human hunger behind it, felt again that sore, beaten feeling which had crushed him as he stood at the foot of the hill and saw her turn her face to that other man. He wondered dumbly what he had done that he should be so outcast from the happiness that fell to other men as their daily lot.

Then swiftly the hard lines of his face relaxed. He gave the girl one of his rare smiles.

"And may you always continue to think so," he said in a voice so charged with friendly warmth that Katherine wondered, as she left the crémerie with him, followed by the totally misapprehending eyes of the bride-of-a-year who kept the desk, why she should ever have thought him indifferent or oblivious.

Certainly, after that, he found time even in the fervor of his work, for some companionable hours, for he told himself, with grim bitterness, that at least he could indulge himself to that extent. There was no need to hide and bury his head like an ostrich. Nature, the arch enemy, had already found him out. It was late in the day for him to be saving himself pain.

By Christmas she would be gone. He would never see her again. The future was utterly a blank. Meanwhile, there was at least for him the sound of her voice, and the light of her unsuspecting eyes.

## BOOK II

### CHAPTER XVII

SUNSHINE again after the weeks of rain, and with the sun there came a brightening of spirits and a laughing away of the fears which had been gathering in those gray, wet days of flying rumor and threatening headlines.

At the Club where Katherine King had lunched with some American acquaintances the reaction of relief was especially vivid. Someone in a pension had been told by someone in another pension who had been told by a sub-editor of a paper—all this in privacy and confidence, to be sure—that an absolute arrangement had been made by the conferring Powers, and there was to be no war at all—except, of course, in the unhappy Balkans where war appeared the status quo—and that everybody could go on with their trips and get their checks cashed and their itineraries arranged.

For this small tableful the cloud was quite dispelled. And now they were sure that it had never been a real cloud, just a pother of dust thrown up by the scareheads and the jingoists and the war party. War—an Eastern-European war—was too absurd to be contem-

plated; it was an anachronism, an obsolete bogy. That sort of thing had been settled by the Peace Conferences. Moreover the deadliness of modern inventions had made warfare too destructive to be possible.

Of all the luncheon party Katherine's relief was probably the keenest, for while she had never believed in this French war at all, still the red tape surrounding it had interfered prodigiously with her plans. For Jeffrey Edgerton's leave had been postponed till the middle of August and as that postponement didn't agree with the plans she had made with the Whartons she had been obliged to write them that she was delayed and beg them to wait for her. And then there had been the possibility of another postponement in the background. It seemed very long since the enchanted day at Les Buissons and even the dear daily letters did not stop the little ache of her hope deferred. But now everything was settled, just as she had known it would be, and they could plan again.

The sunshine was too glorious to waste, after those dull, dark days, so when she left her friends she started on one of those rambling strolls through the older streets which never failed to delight her even after these five months of Paris, a stroll having for objective a tiny lace shop in one of the old quarters.

It was Saturday, the first of August. She looked back on that date afterwards as separated, as by the sudden cleavage of a sword, from everything which had gone before in her life.

She walked slowly, lingering in the Jardins where the children were again at play, and it was after four

when she came to her tiny shop and it was dark in the narrow place.

But even in the dimness it was impossible not to see that the young woman who came slowly forward to wait upon her had been crying. Her face was swollen and her breath came brokenly as she went about the measuring of the lace and the tying of the little parcel. Only the necessary words were uttered. Katherine would have liked to find the right expression of interest for the poor thing's evident trouble but the shyness of sympathy and the fear of intrusion took her quickly away.

And then out on the sidewalk again, in the glow of the August sun, she came upon a couple clasped in each other's arms, the woman wildly sobbing. "Oh, non—non—non!" the poor thing was gasping, her thin hands clutching the man's shoulders, and the man, a young *ouvrier*, in his blue cotton blouse and greasy trousers, was patting her heaving shoulders with dumb devotion.

Katherine slipped past them with bent head, wondering vaguely if some tragedy of the quarter had befallen, and then in the restaurant just ahead, where she had contemplated a cup of tea on one of the little tables shining in the sun, she saw the wife of the proprietor with her head on arms outcast across one of the table tops, and an unnoticed baby pulling at her skirts.

Just beyond, a knot of people were standing, talking excitedly, hands gesticulating, eyes gleaming, the words crackling like whips. Beside an old, one-armed man Katherine stopped.

"What is it, please? What is it?"

"C'est arrivée . . . c'est arrivée," said the old man.

"*What* has come?"

"C'est arrivée. . . . C'est la guerre."

*La guerre*—the word beat meaninglessly in her ears as she hurried away, turning instinctively toward the Avenue de l'Opéra. War—France was in war, then? The trouble which had seemed to be brewing in such far-off cauldrons, that cry of Slavic peril—what had that to do with France?

Those rumors, then, those flying undertones of anxiety, the whisperings of the men about the cafés, the gatherings of the women in the streets, these had not been meaningless ebullitions of anxiety, of far-fetched apprehension born of the terrible memories of 1870. These people had *known*——

Her thoughts flew to Jeffrey. Could this actually involve England? But it could delay his leave and play havoc with their cherished plans. She told herself that was all, but the queer breathless excitement in her was tightening its tension. She raced along the streets faster and faster.

Now a throng blocked the way, a jostling crowd of men of all sorts and conditions, silk-hatted men, with side whiskers suggesting the aisle managers in the shops, men with tall coachmen's whips, blue-bloused, grimy men, a chauffeur in khaki, and a footman in a gleaming livery of silver and blue and buff, a wonderful creature that one supposed had no reality except a waxen pose upon the boxes of carriages with coroneted doors. Yet

here he was in the rear of that crowd, pushing, talking, shoving, his sphinx-like gaze alive and vibrant.

Katherine plucked at the sleeve of the nearest man; when he remained oblivious she shook it vehemently.

"What is it? What is it?"

He looked down on her with glassy eyes. It was the mobilization order, she was told, and pressing closer into the throng, she caught the glaring print of the huge posters.

ARMEE de TERRE et ARMEE de MER

ORDRE

DE MOBILIZATION GENERALE

Very quietly and very soberly she made her way out of that crowd through the streets. Over and over again she tried to tell herself just what it was that was happening but her mind refused to accept the monstrous thing. A million men in arms. A million men uprooted. And many times a million hearts wrung with parting and suspense. . . .

The streets were scene after scene of parting. Paris was oblivious of everything but the beating of her own heart. Everywhere the girl saw the sudden, unforgettable glimpses of agony, an old mother clinging to her sons, a man taking the ribbon from the neck of his little child to stuff within his shirt, a husband comforting a wife, a girl stifling her sobs as her sweetheart left her. . . . A million men going. . . . Everyone between the ages of twenty-one and forty-eight. . . .

At the American Express Office and at Cook's the Americans were gathering excitably, but to Katherine's heart, weighted with sympathy for the great griefs of France, the anxieties of her compatriots as to boats and trains and money was not of great moment. What did it matter if they were delayed, or lost a passage or had no money for a time? They would somehow be fed and cared for; their hearts were not wrung with parting from sons and husbands ordered to meet the cannon of the enemy.

Her American acquaintances of that day's luncheon party were in the throng, their buoyant assurance of noontime gone, their ire the keener against the reassurances of the sub-editor which had percolated so cheeringly from pension to pension. There, also, were the two American art teachers studying at the Académie, resolved on getting out of this dangerous place at the earliest opportunity.

Through the various notes of the throng, some querulous, some anxious, most of them patiently good-natured, she heard one boy's jubilant accents, "Why I wouldn't have missed this for anything! This is an *experience!*"

An experience! Yes, it was that, even for him. But for the French?

Outside Robert MacNare's door she found him talking with a group of Frenchmen, artists she recognized as his occasional companions at a café, two already in uniform. In the dim hall, in her cage, Madame Bonnet sat unstirringly, her head sunk forward on her shoulders.

Katherine felt a fresh pang, remembering the younger son Henri was still doing his military service. "This will mean Henri?" she said, with diffident sympathy.

Madame Bonnet raised her head slowly, staring straight at nothing.

"Les deux," she said expressionlessly.

Of course it would mean them both! How sluggishly her mind was working. Jean was not thirty. He would be going to-day, leaving Marie alone upon the farm with her little ones.

It is only by individual instances that the mind comprehends a general disaster. The greatness of it is too great. But when one knows that it is Henri and Jean—and Marie who is left—when it means the husband in the crémerie across the way whose little wife of a year is expecting her baby, when it means the only son of the old woman boarding overhead with them, and the tailor down the street whose five children are motherless, why then, pang by pang, the meaning of pain comes home.

A million men. . . .

That evening Katherine strolled with MacNare up and down the Boul' Miche', an altered, sober Boul' Miche', where the students, with linked arms sang "The Marseillaise," with young voices that shook in the beginning of their passionate realization of love of country. And everywhere were the scenes of parting, and everywhere through the streets the incessant rolling of taxi-cabs and carts and automobiles and carriages and fiacres, laden with men and women and luggage of every

description, hurrying to and from every station in the city, men arriving, provincials leaving, foreigners fleeing, a turmoil of transit.

Sometimes there were cheers and gay greetings for some crowd of dusty reservists marching by with haversacks over their shoulders and a long loaf of bread sticking from some jacket pocket; sometimes the irrepressible humor of the people would be tickled to smile at some self-conscious boy parading with a pretty girl in his fresh regimentals, red-trousered, blue-coated, his knapsack and rifle and tin pans clattering as he walked, but the tears were too near the surface for laughter, and the uniform was too dear to their hearts for youth's naïve airs to alter the symbol. And the boy's young pride in his glory was touchingly in contrast with the future for which he was destined. Old men and women cried blessings on him as he passed and little girls ran after to slip a small flag in his hands.

Among the students many that Katherine knew were going, for only those of under twenty-one remained. "You will be shouting for us soon," one band of these youngsters called merrily to a group of older friends who were already in the colors.

Among these later Katherine saw Etienne de Trésac, wearing his uniform with easy distinction, his handsome face alight with enthusiasm as he passed with one arm flung about a comrade's shoulders.

He waved his hand gayly to her and she waved back, calling, "Good luck!" They were her first words to him since that wretched parting in the studio; indeed

she had scarcely seen him since for he had ceased his desultory attendance upon the summer classes.

And there was Olga, strolling with girls she did not know, talking eagerly and searching the faces she passed as if she were seeking someone. Katherine called to her but Olga returned only that same indifference and aloofness which had marked her manner since that Sunday morning. Katherine wondered if the girl were looking for Louis Arnaud, hoping that he would pass through Paris and the quarter on the way to whatever barracks claimed him, and she, too, half unconsciously, began to look for him but he was not to be seen.

MacNare was very silent. To one question of hers he replied, rather contemptuously that he was not going to run away. He did not think that the Germans would reach Paris, although they must be magnificently ready or they would never have incurred the war.

"But do you think—that the Germans have always intended—?" she began diffidently, feeling her deep ignorance of the real Europe.

He looked down on her somberly. "For years the guns have been invented, the powder made, the boy babies encouraged into the word ere this day should come! Now that men and machines are at a maximum strength they judge the time has come to toss a match into the powder. Any match will do. In 1913 it might have been one thing; in 1914 the Archduke's murder will do as well as another. Raise the cry of Slavic peril —and march on to France. Straight to the heart of her, get Paris by the throat, make her buy her breath with a strip of sea coast opposite England. . . . Then

peace, perhaps, for more machines and more men and more powder—but not forty years of it, for eyes will be opened—and then England. . . . And then——"

Katherine could only stammer, "But—but I thought the Germans were different—were——"

"The Germans? When have the Germans ruled Germany? When have the Schuberts and the Schumanns and the Goethes and the Schillers and the Wagners and the Heines been a political influence? . . . The Germans, individually, are delightful—collectively their very peculiar virtues make them the finest instrument in the world for Prussian militarism to wield—docile, fervent, sentimental, brave. . . . Pour them out in masses, inflame them with a prepared brand of patriotism, instill a calculated hatred, fling them at the enemy—there you have your ideal fighting machine. . . . God help those boys," he added under his breath, his black-browed gaze on the marching ranks.

"Then—then what in the world is to happen?"

He said very slowly, "A struggle to the death."

Her eyes clung to him in sudden appeal. "Will England be in it?"

"Who knows?" Then as if he knew that she found his answer evasive he said grimly, "I hope so."

"You are cruel," she said chokingly.

"I am not thinking of individuals. The hour has struck for nations."

The grim foreboding of his words settled like a weight on her heart.

With the crowd they followed to the Gare de l'Est

to see the men depart. Here the men were to take trains for Toul, Verdun, or for whatever barracks where they were to report the next day. And their destination after that? Who knew?

A high iron fence stretched in front of the station, with three gates—three gates guarded by soldiers. Three scenes of last farewell . . . and scenes more terrible in their poignancy, their ultimate realization, than those the day had held.

Outside the fence was crushed a crowd of people, men, women, children, a crowd that from the hundreds leaped to thousands as more and more arrived. And every instant the streams of reservists came through them, some arriving in taxis, some in carts, some on foot, most of them singing, many cheering, but some deadly quiet, stoic, their arms about some woman.

It made Katherine think of the guillotine. For just one last minute those women had their men, their sons, their sweethearts, their husbands, clutched in their arms, warm and safe against their breasts, and then—through the iron gate—into the black oblivion of the future. . . . And so many . . . so many. . . .

What would happen? What would happen?

She heard the sounds of the women's sobs under all the strains of "The Marseillaise"; she could feel the breaking of their hearts under all the fervor of sacrifice that had leaped to meet the spiritual demand of their defense.

"C'est pour la France," "C'est pour la patrie"—these were the words she heard oftenest on the lips of boys to their mothers, of husbands to their wives, and the

women, too, touched with this sacrificial flame, echoed it with lips that paled with their deeper understanding of what lay back of those words. Some of those women remembered 1870. Some had worn black since that year. . . .

"C'est pour la France," Katherine heard one acquiesce in a dry whisper. She had parted with her husband and three sons in that moment. Alone she turned and made her way out of the throng. And as she went she kept tapping upon her breast and speaking in that husky voice which was like the last dry whisper of a consumptive, "C'est fini—c'est tout fini."

The individual was finished. . . . It was only nations now that counted.



## CHAPTER XVIII

BY Sunday noon two facts had made their connection for Katherine.

There were no potatoes at her little restaurant. People were provisioning for a siege.

She had not thought till then very particularly of herself, not sharing the traveler's contagion for flight. Indeed she had declared herself a resident of Paris, so that, having secured her papers of identification, she would not have to continue to report each morning at nine as transients were to be required to do. She still intended to leave for London upon the tenth, if she did not hear to the contrary from Jeffrey Edgerton, and it seemed best to her now to wait where she could get word from him, and then accept his decision. Now the excitement of the times was gaining upon her.

By Monday the auto busses were gone from the streets. People were swarming about the provision dealers, carrying or wheeling away sacks of flour and rice and macaroni, and Katherine went out and painfully lugged home a heavy supply—to the Surly Man's amusement.

"Are you going to bake for the army?" he demanded, wresting the load from her arms.

Change was scarce. The shops were iron-barred and shuttered; the streets were empty of men and quiet of all traffic. In the gloom of a chill rain Paris looked grim and forbidding.

Into the quiet streets the newsboys had rushed with their damp sheets, "Speciale de la Guerre!" now announcing Germany's ultimatum to Belgium. Indignation ran high. The excitement was tense but not hysterical. Later, another edition told of the bombardment of Lunéville.

In the larger department stores while some girls were busy putting away stock the others were making Red Cross supplies. The sight of these bandages, deftly rolled by those busy fingers, was the first glimpse to Katherine of what thing it was that Paris was preparing for. Having sent her youth and strength to meet the enemy she sat waiting to receive the shattered returns.

The next morning she found the door of MacNare's studio wide open and narrow cots being carried in. She saw that the great room was stripped and cleared, with the statues and marble crowded into one corner, and cot after cot was standing in a white, orderly row. Peggy was scurrying up and down the stairs with bundles in her arms.

"A sick man's a-coming," she whispered excitedly to Katherine, her eyes big with the fascination of novelty.

"We shall sleep on the top floor—I've given this for a little nursing dépôt," said MacNare, and it was not

from him, but from the nursing sister, a quiet, gray-haired woman of Le Croix Rouge, that Katherine learned that his private income was being given for its service.

She felt her heart contract with the painful expectancy of those white beds.

No letter had come from Jeffrey, and she doubted if her telegrams to him had reached him. She felt isolated and alone, and a feeling of fear was creeping higher and higher in her, like a stealthily rising tide. Everywhere the talk was of England. What would she do? Day had dawned with the Germans still in Belgium, having made no reply to Great Britain's midnight warning, demanding respect for Belgium's neutrality, and all day there was that horrible sense of waiting, waiting. . . . Did the Germans mean to go on, to strike an innocent country, to flout their sacred pledges, the rights of nations? Was that way to France so clear to them that they judged they could hew through it and seize Paris before Great Britain's arm could reach them? Did they feel themselves strong enough to overwhelm at once those nations that withstood them? And if they did——

She read Sir Edward Grey's speech before the English Parliament and she thrilled—but her thrill died in a shudder. There was a horrible, muffled pounding in her heart as if it were blindly fleeing from some unnamable apprehension. . . .

She tried to tell herself that it was a hundred years since England had sent men to a European soil, and that only the gravest urgency would bring them now—but still the Germans were in Belgium.

Late in the afternoon a letter from Jeffrey, much de-

layed, reached her already opened, thus giving mute evidence of the activities of the censor. It was very brief and grave; he promised to let her know as soon as anything was certain for him.

That night she went to the Boul' Miche' with MacNare and Peggy, and strolled up and down among the little groups that were casting occasional glances up at the sky for stealthily gliding Taubes. Once a guarding aeroplane winged its way overhead, the hum of its engines sounding faintly, like a swarm of far-away bees.

From out a brown study she said aloud, "If I left at once——"

MacNare was painfully clairvoyant to the girl's thoughts. His voice was full of rugged understanding. "I don't believe you could see him," he said. "He is with his regiment and any moment——"

She echoed, "Any moment!"

As he looked at her, her slender figure drooping slightly as she walked beside him, her youthful color paling under premonitions of anxiety, he felt a resurgence of old anger against the idiocy of this scheme of things. What infinite waste! With no great confidence in the good intentions of life toward himself, he had unconsciously conceived of no destiny as capable of treachery to this girl's bright trust. And now, to see the beginning of fear in her eyes——

"But she is too young to know what it means," he told himself. "And she will have his heroism to adore. . . . He is one of life's lucky ones."

He stopped and bought her one of the little English

flags offered for sale with those of France and Russia and Belgium and Servia.

Everywhere upon the streets was the talk of England's sending troops to Belgium. Some rumors declared that they were already on the way. There were stories now of fighting near Liège, and the women and old men and boys told each other, with kindling faces and shining eyes, of Belgium's heroic reply to Germany.

Four mornings later Madame Bonnet was at her door with a blue envelope, and ripping it open, Katherine stared blankly at the French words,

Ayez ~~de~~ du courage. Avec tout mon cœur,

JEFFREY.

All telegrams must now be sent in French, but the unwonted phrases seemed utterly unrelated to her lover. It took a moment for her mind to realize the truth. "Have courage," she repeated under her breath, and then, "With all my heart."

"From the Captain?" madame was eagerly demanding. "The English, mademoiselle, they are in France?"

Katherine turned a soft, unseeing look to her. She spoke without emotion. "Yes, they are in France. The message came from Havre."

Jeffrey was there with his men, moving somewhere toward the fighting. . . .

It was incredible to her. If she could have seen him again, could have talked with him, have held him in her arms as those women had held their men, if they could have met and parted, the parting would have been believ-

able, but this blank—this silence—this slip of blue paper with strange, hurried words——

She could have held it a dream but for that grinding pain in her side, that sick, drunken lurching of her heart.

"God be thanked!" said madame. "The English—they keep their word. Oh, God be thanked they are come."

The sight of the girl's blanched face recalled her.

"C'est la guerre," she repeated to her, laying a hand upon her shoulder in a comrade's gesture. "You are one with us, mademoiselle." And as she turned away, her flare of enthusiasm sunken to the stolidity of every-day, "This is war."

Unthinkable now to leave Paris, to leave the city for whose safety her lover was fighting. She was nearer to him here than anywhere; here he would know where to address her.

So she wrote long, cheerful letters home, saying she was safe and well and better off than in a friendless England, scrambling for steerage in an overloaded ship. They were not to worry. And she wrote the Whartons, fearing their unselfish sense of responsibility might delay them for her, that they were not to wait, that she had friends who would care for her.

No one knew when mail would be delivered, but having seen her letters into a box she felt she had done her utmost and gave herself to the present.

## CHAPTER XIX

IN those tense days of waiting, when the red rush of the invader rolled nearer and nearer to the gates of Paris, Katherine King knew that incredible, stifling sensation of one struggling to break the gripping bonds of nightmare. So utterly had war been a thing apart from the happy security of her American environment that it was fantastic and unreal to be here in this city that was girding itself for mortal combat, with the rage and ruin of war blazing closer and closer, and somewhere on that red line of defense the man whose life was dearer to her than her own.

"Can this be I?" the girl thought dumbly, as she walked those silent streets, where the children ceased to play, and waited with those patient, tragic crowds of women and old men for the official communiqués.

Ah, those communiqués! How infrequent they were —and how laconic! And always the same. Always the Germans were nearer, nearer, a great, oncoming, machine-mass, endless, irresistible. The front ranks that went down were like the vanishing foam on an incoming tide. The tide surged in, mighty, unstopping. She knew the paralyzing fear of helplessness. She saw it re-

flected in the faces of the men and women about her, deepened with their knowledge of what helplessness had meant in a bitter past.

"It is the guns," said the little bride-of-a-year, in the crémerie, clinging pitifully to her hands. "They have the guns, mademoiselle, the monsters that deal destruction. For this they have been making ready. . . . And our men are there. . . ."

"You must not cry so, you must not," Katherine whispered, her own throat choked, her heart aching.

The little woman flung back her head, with an effort of defiance. "I will not," she answered. "I will live for the child. And if it is a son—a son whose father does not return—then when he is a man I will put a gun in his hands to slay the murderers of his father!"

So the war seed was sown, thought Katherine; so the heritage of hate and enmity brought its festering fulfillment.

"You will not talk so when you have sons to lose," said the old woman who boarded with her. "My mother saw five go in 1870 and I was all that was left to her. And then my man—he was my bridegroom—it was there he got the wound that took him off in the end. But for that he would be here now. . . . You will not talk so when you have lived a little more."

She turned feebly to Katherine. "Is there news, mademoiselle? I am not strong to go out in the streets to-day——"

And Katherine went for them and searched the scanty lists for those names that meant everything to those women. There were very few lists and those brief and

incomplete, but by now the wounded were being brought into the city, and hurried from the hospital trains to those waiting beds, and little bands of women went from ward to ward, waiting patiently to speak to the nurse, to ask if such an one were here, or if any of his regiment, or if there was news of that regiment.

All day now Katherine made Red Cross supplies, or aided where she could in the nursing going on in MacNare's small asylum. Only the lightest cases were brought there, but as she went from bed to bed, looking down on those rows of wan, drawn faces, Katherine's heart contracted with the terror of deepened understanding. And the meaning of war, the murderous onslaught of man against man, raised its bloody face upon her from the draping veils of glory and of custom.

The story of Belgium, brought by flying rumor, gasped from the lips of the first poor refugees, had reached the city and set the anxious hearts there afire with a passion of agonized sympathy. Eyes were raised to the mute skies; locked hands were lifted in despairing prayer. Women fled to the churches to plead at the Madonna's feet for pity upon those helpless ones and safety for their own.

It seemed to Katherine that the sun could never shine for her again. That in this day of vaunted Christianity invaders who took Christ's name in prayer could pour upon a peaceful countryside, burning, shooting, stabbing, terrorizing, meeting the defense of innocent burghers with the brutalities of Huns, with wanton reprisals, with wholesale slaughter; that men who called themselves Christians could fling themselves methodical-

ly upon a country of unoffending neutrals and rend it limb from limb in the name of "political necessity"; that barbaric slogan of "Might is Right," filled her with shocked and fiery horror.

All the idealisms, the sugary coating of civilization's assurances, went down like a pack of cards. . . . While the Kaiser had been signing his "scraps of paper" at the Hague, the engines for this destruction were being forged, the plans made for Germany's march through the neutrality she was swearing to protect! . . . Prussia's place in the sun! . . . Big Business, bludgeon-weaponed, empire-crowned, tramping human rights and lives underfoot in the name of a Fatherland! . . . . That was conquest.

Often the Surly Man, wrung by the girl's white cheeks and questioning eyes, made her come for long walks with him through the strange and silent streets, emptied of sound and stir, motorless, trafficless, where old men and youths drilled in little squads and herds of sheep and cattle grazed in the Bois and Champs Elysées. Out from the city had streamed long miles of refugees, women and children, most of them, mothers bearing their babies to safety, little lads hurried by frightened grandmothers, rich or poor, all unprepared and needy, they had poured out the gates and down the dusty roads beyond the sound of guns.

Hushed and tensely waiting, her heart with her youth upon her battle-line, Paris was beautiful in those August days as never before. The uncut grass grew long in her gardens; the red geraniums and white roses rioted gorgeously in the borders. And at night the moonlight

bathed the lampless streets in spectral brilliancy, glistening white upon the dome of Les Invalides, upon the Arc de Triomphe, upon the blunt towers of Notre Dame and delicate traceries of fretted column and Gothic arch. . . . If Paris was to die it would be in the full panoply of her beauty, in the splendor of her ancient and irrecoverable loveliness.

Nearer and nearer the battle-line. On it came, closer, closer, with dull and sullen thunder stealing from the horizon, an arrow-pointed battering ram hammering and hammering, a sweeping tide, surging and submerging, and then—in a sugar-beet field near Claye, ten miles from the outer fortifications of Paris, the furthest reaching fringe of that tide was met and turned. Slowly it receded, borne back by desperate force. . . .

The communiqués were first cautious, then explicit. They told of places retaken, of advances made. Now twenty, now thirty, now forty miles, that line of battle was pushed back. And in Paris, the clutch upon the heart relaxed. Free breath was drawn again. Grateful eyes shone in white faces.

That Sunday of September was France's day of thanksgiving.

But all this time no word of Jeffrey. No scrap of writing came back from that unknown place in the front of battle.

She heard the stories of the poor, wounded boys in the hospitals and she thought of him there in the days and nights, harried and desperate, fighting those over-

whelming odds, pushed back, still stubbornly defending, outnumbered but bitterly resisting, each instant a chance in the hell of battle, and her heart would stop its beating before those fears to which she dared not give a name.

Yet because she was young and the eclipse of personal disaster was unthinkable she could draw deeply upon hope. But the blackness of that waiting! . . . The bitterness of knowing nothing . . . of fearing everything. . . . She lived years in those weeks, and in her eyes darkened that look of dumb questioning which she pitied in the women's eyes about her.

Sometimes she wrote her heart out to her mother, only to tear the letter into a hundred pieces. Why sadden those dear ones at homes with her own agony of suspense? . . . It would shock and wound them. . . . And any day now might bring news. . . . Any moment she might hear. . . .

And no news was not the worst. . . .

So she went about her work, rolling bandages with a little group of French workers, taking lessons in nursing from one of many classes held, spending her money in comforts for the poor boys in the hospitals and the wretched refugees that brought the misery of Belgium home again and again to tender hearts, writing brave letters to America, begging more money for help for the homeless ones—and then one day the miracle happened, and there was a new heaven and a new earth about her.

Its precursor was a tremor of alarm, for Madame Bonnet came into her room, bringing Jeanne and little

Thomas with her, and the sight of the children brought a fear of disaster, so many terrible stories had come of slaughter and fire, and bloody reprisals.

Quickly Madame Bonnet explained. "No, no, the Germans have not been there. They were all about, but, God be thanked, the village was saved. A wood just beyond—they could not get through that, where our soldiers had their guns. . . . But Marie has sent them. The train came in this morning. She feels it safer in case anything should happen to her—she is not well, you understand, and her time is come. . . . See, the little innocents—they are big-eyed with the war. The soldiers took the pigs, yes, our soldiers—they have stomachs, the poor lads. Does Marie think they win battles upon emptiness?"

"And news—have you news of your boys?" Katherine asked quickly.

"Of Jean, yes. He is one of those stationed in the wood beyond the village. One arm was out, nothing to make a fuss about you understand. A scratch, when the Boches tried to come through the wood at night." Madame was excited; her old liveliness reanimated her face, which had been settling into lines of mask-like rigidity. "But it is not of my boys that mademoiselle is thinking—no?"

A look of sly pleasure came in the old woman's eyes and she pushed little Jeanne toward the girl. "Show the mademoiselle what is about thy neck."

Obediently the child began to tug at a discolored ribbon; presently a little leather case came outside her collar band.

"*Voilà, mademoiselle,*" she said shyly, putting it in Katherine's hand.

But Madame Bonnet could contain herself no longer.

"From *Monsieur le Capitaine*!" she exploded. "From the Captain of mademoiselle! In truth! In truth! He came riding through the wood—he came to the farm, and learning that the children were about to start he declared that Jeanne was safer than the post!"

Madame chuckled delightedly, her keys jingling with their old fervor. "Read, mademoiselle," she exhorted, as if Katherine were not already lost in those few hurried lines. "Read, and tell me what he says! . . . All is well, yes?"

Thumb-grimed and creased, the little square of paper lay in Katherine's hand.

> My Dearest Katherine:
>
> Fancy writing you at the old farm in such times! We have had the devil's own scratch of it, but now we're getting a bit of our own back. It's nasty business—to see your comrades going—but it's for the right, and we're in it to the finish. You mustn't worry about me, darling, even if you don't hear. With your love all mine there isn't a bullet that can stop me. Write me here; we'll stick a bit till we get forward.
>
> Your
>
> Jeffrey.

As an afterthought he scribbled that he was perfectly well though starving, and Marie had produced a fine hen for him.

Little Jeanne supplied a thousand eager details, when once her shyness was overcome. The Captain had taken her up on his big horse; he had laughed and kissed her and told her, Oh, yes, she was not to forget, that this kiss was for Mademoiselle Katherine. And the child reached forward and clasped her arms about Katherine's neck.

"He held me like this, like this," she explained.

Madame clapped her hands eagerly. She forgot that she had cherished a grievance against this Captain who had so utterly overthrown those unselfish hopes for MacNare and little Peggy; she forgot that she had scarcely glimpsed his features that night when he had come inquiring for Katherine, and she broke into fervent praises of his handsome appearance and his valor. She beamed upon that picture of his on the girl's table. "A man in a thousand—a man of courage and of heart! . . . But mademoiselle," she added naïvely, "is there any word of Henri? Has the Captain heard?"

And at Katherine's gesture of pitying negation, "Of course he would not hear, among so many," she returned with a semblance of briskness. "But I think of my chickens, of course! . . . It is so long . . . but silence is better than the word of death. That poor old mother over the crémerie! She heard last night. . . . It was at Mons, during that long retreat. . . . They sent her a silver ring of his. She says nothing. . . . But the wife there told me that she had laid upon her bed some little things she had saved, a baby shoe of his, you understand, and a little dress and a card of his first letters and sits there looking at them."

Madame Bonnet wiped her eyes. "It is for France, of course, but it is very hard. . . . Why should such things be, mademoiselle?"

She added, restlessly, "It is hard on a mother not to smooth her son's brow in his last moments, not to look into his face. . . . But there is no help for it. . . ."

The children, growing more familiar in the room, recalled her.

"Jeanne! That is the mademoiselle's cushion—do not let thy little brother sprawl upon it like that! Thank the mademoiselle for the chocolate. . . . That is better. . . . I must take these little ones to a neighbor," she added, "for I have much to do if I am to leave to-night. Would mademoiselle prefer to confide a letter to me sooner than to the army post? If the Captain Edgerton is stationed there I shall get it to him with certainty."

"But where are you going?" Katherine demanded quickly.

"To Les Buissons, of course. My daughter needs me. . . . Besides, it is my home and my heart has been heavy with fears for it. I shall go to-night." She nodded her head slowly, with the air of a Sibyl confirming a decision.

"But the permits—the passes——?"

"There is a train to-night," said madame, and Katherine saw that she was formulating a plan already matured. "I shall obtain a permit if I must have one—in truth I am but returning to my home. . . . And if mademoiselle will make ready her letter——"

"My letter?" Impetuously Katherine turned upon

her, her face shining, a great hope dancing in her eyes like a blown flame. "Myself!"

And as the Frenchwoman opened her lips, "Surely if I go at once I must find him! He said to write him there. Anyway I would be near—if he should be hurt. . . . Oh, I could make my way to him. Dear Madame Bonnet, you get me a permit, if I must have it, or let me just slip along with you. Help me. . . . I must go. . . . I know I shall find him."

And then, trying to speak more calmly and reasonably, "Since they are running trains for the refugees to return to their homes, surely it is not so difficult to let me go on one of them?"

"It is not so easy." Madame eyed her doubtfully.

No, Katherine knew that it was not so easy. She knew that newspaper correspondents were mewed up in Paris, cooling their heels in much-to-be-regretted but unavoidable delays; she knew that when their military passes were at last made out many started for the front in their expensively acquired motors only to meet with strange difficulties over papers, with polite detentions. . . . No, it was not so easy. France was not baring her defenses and her stories for every writer to rush to print. The censorship was unimaginably strict.

And in a country constantly betrayed by spies, with treachery slipping through every avenue of life, the mere presence of a foreigner in an unwonted place was suspicious in itself. Many of the Americans who still remained in Paris, and even English visitors, were subjected to constant surveillance, and she herself had often

been made aware that her simple days were not unnoticed.

Once madame humorously reported to her a controversy between herself and a questioning agent.

"I told him," madame had reported, "that you were betrothed to an English captain at the front, and the wretch replied that any German would betroth herself to any number of captains to obtain a shred of information. . . . But I took him down your letter from home, telling of the money coming for the refugees," madame concluded triumphantly, "and *that* settled his imagination. . . . The good God knows they must have a little reason in their suspicions."

Reflecting upon this vanished letter from her desk, Katherine perceived that life in France now must be an open book. But in no way had she been annoyed. Perhaps Madame Bonnet's allegiance, perhaps the friendship of Robert MacNare had removed her from suspicion.

Now she gave no thought to the difficulties, the possible dangers. She was on fire with the knowledge that the fortunes of war had brought Edgerton to Les Buissons, of all dear places, and that he was actually within reach. If it were humanly possible she was going to him.

And so she stormed Madame Bonnet's sympathies and affections, and that good woman surrendered, not at discretion, but with an enthusiasm that entered wholeheartedly into the plan.

"But you may have to be my cousin," she declared, eyeing Katherine with an air of humorous misgiving.

"My cousin, whose grandfather went to America. . . . I had such cousins—or my mother did. We have lost track of them. . . . But if you are to come with me put on your hat—no, not that one, you are too *chic*, child, and come and say nothing. We shall see what we shall see."

## CHAPTER XX

IT was not humanly possible that everyone in that station had passes! Katherine eyed the throng with hopeful reassurance, as she edged her way through it after Madame Bonnet's bulky person. Her American passport, and papers of identification were tucked safely away within her blouse, in case of some serious difficulty arising, but for the present she trusted wholly to madame's protection.

And it had proved as simple as addition. It had been merely a matter of getting to the station, of finding when a train left for Les Buissons, of buying the tickets and waiting until the train actually left.

The pair of them were an unnoticed part of that jostling crowd of refugees, returning to the homes which they had left through the fear or the fact of German occupation, vigorous women clutching babies and bundles and birdcages, middle-aged men in peasant smocks, some of them, some of them in their Sunday best, by way of carrying it, and girls and boys with arms piled with indiscriminate household goods, most of their faces wreathed in smiles at this return to their acres.

But there were some who were going back to villages through which the Germans had actually passed, once in the rush of their advance and once in the bitterness of their retreat, and these were troubled, and apprehensive of what might lie before them. Here the women talked of their homes and household supplies and the men and boys of the crops and the hayricks.

Into a train already crammed beyond all hope of comfort, Katherine followed Madame Bonnet, and found wedged places among thirteen others in a compartment intended for eight. Nor was their number limited to the two-legged. One little youngster, in an incredibly dirty dress, sat at her grandmother's feet, repeatedly enveloping a restless kid in a stout shawl which was also wrapped about her own head, so that the child's head kept bobbing like a mandarin's with the little kid's restless efforts to escape.

An *infirmière* major and her five nurses, one of the many flying corps sent out by the Union des Femmes de France, were in the compartment, and Katherine watched the clear-eyed women in their neat uniforms and official cloaks with eyes of devoted respect. She wished that she could go as they were going to bring healing to those wounded men. Often she had thought of volunteering, trusting to her quickness in the courses of instruction, already undertaken, added to the experience she was gaining in assisting the nurses in MacNare's tiny hospital, but the fear of being under orders and away from communication and the chance of word from Jeffrey had held her back. And there had been plenty for her to do in unofficial ways. Now she thought

that if the war lasted, and Jeffrey wished her to, she would try to get taken on by the Red Cross—if only to scrub floors and wash clothes until she could take responsibility. And washing and making clean were no small part of nursing anyway!

She would have liked to talk with the nurses, in especial with one slender woman whose eyes had met hers in a friendly way, but she shrank from drawing official attention to herself and devoted herself to occupying as little space as possible in order to give them more for their rest. Most of the time she stood out in the crowded corridor, leaning against the barred glass window, looking into the darkening night. As long as it was light she could see bands of refugees returning to the places from which the threat of invasion seemed averted, many more by far than those who had come to Paris by train, a broken procession of people driving goats and sheep and cows and carrying hens and geese and household pets among their other bundles. Sometimes a cart would be so loaded that a man would be glimpsed tugging away with the ox or decrepit horse. These people seemed going north, to the villages beyond Les Buissons, where the Germans had actually penetrated. They were marching now with hope and courage, vastly different from the despair which sent them streaming.

It grew dusk and the October haze veiled the landscape; then night came on rapidly. Now the train was rumbling through a darkness punctuated by occasional brief flares of bonfires against which men's figures were silhouetted.

"The soldiers are roasting thy cow," one boy said roguishly to a neighbor as they passed such a fire just before the village which was their destination.

The train was stopping frequently, with racking jerks, and a guard would often put his head in the door, eyeing the occupants, but a glimpse of the nurses seemed to allay all suspicion. And when at last, after delays interminable to Katherine's eager impatience, they came to Les Buissons, now the end of the railroad, for on the German's advance the tracks beyond had been torn up, and the nurses gathered their satchels, Katherine knew a mingled motive in the quickness with which she volunteered to carry the bag of the little slender lady who had so roused her interest.

But she did not need to attach herself to the gray-cloaked group to avoid suspicion, for the very responsible young soldier who was peering determinedly at each arrival with the manner of one upon whose thoroughness empires rested and thrones balanced proved well known to Madame Bonnet and she literally fell upon him with a storm of questions. A few moments later, leaving the platform, she was venting her disgust to Katherine.

"As if his red breeches must make him uncivil! . . . I, that shook the breath of life into his lungs when he was coughing his way out of this world ere he had been a minute in it! . . . I, that nursed his mother! . . . Not to be able to answer my questions! He might have told me about Marie."

Still grumbling at the village boy's importance she hurried forward into the town square where the embers

of a fire were glowing on the cobblestones, surrounded by half a hundred dark, sprawling figures.

"They will get a bomb dropped on them for their comfort," grumbled madame, still ruffled. "But I suppose they would rather ruin the town than endure chilblains."

A few lights flickered in the windows of the inn and in the small shops where soldiers were quartered, and from some open windows a sound of voices and young laughter drifted down. Horses were stabled all about, and the reek of sweaty skins and leather, the unwashed odors of battling men, poured to them across the little square, but faintly purified by the acrid smell of the burnt wood and autumn leaves.

Dull and muffled, like thunder on the horizon, there was sounding the rumble of far-away guns in some rhythmic artillery duel of the night.

From one of the soldiers in the square, a young man of the neighborhood, the two women found that the firing line was far beyond the town, and that these soldiers had been sent back for a snatch at rest after their long hardships. They would be sent forward again at any moment if the enemy attacked, but there was hope of reinforcements from the south. Yes, the English were there—somewhere out beyond the town, but where the young fellow could not say. They had better see the officers—and the mayor. Certainly they would not be allowed to move near the actual line of battle without permits and papers.

"We will go to my home," said madame, a little indignant at this red tape on her native heath.

But the soldier was not sure whether she would get there. There would be sentries. He had an idea that the second line of trenches, for a possible retreat, ran somewhere near the Bonnet place, and his advice to these two women who had the bad sense to leave Paris in such times was to find the mayor or the proper officials.

He was asleep and snoring before madame could make up her mind as to whether it would be best to take the advice or not.

However the mayor was not inaccessible. He was a second cousin of madame's upon her mother's side, and a big, brawny, white-haired giant of a man. They found him at the new inn, arranging for the temporary accommodation of the corps of nurses and upon madame's appearance he welcomed her delightedly, and reassured her as to Jean's safety and Marie's. And upon being informed of Katherine's desire to discover the location of the ——th Guards, he led them promptly, protesting that it was no difficulty, that his night was not for sleep but for his village, to a room where the French officers could direct them.

And Katherine found herself in a tiny room thick with tobacco smoke, confronting four unknown young Frenchmen who had risen from a table of cards, while Madame Bonnet poured out not only an appeal for information but an explicit statement of the young English captain's engagement and the venerable mayor uttered continuous assurances as to madame's utter loyalty and reliability. They were amused but sympathetic, those four young men, and eyeing the American

girl's embarrassed color and eager eyes they proceeded to felicitate the unknown Captain. The English had been in the town, they told her, but now they occupied the edge of woods just beyond it, and the —th Guards, for whom she was inquiring, were stationed in the old château to the north.

"Then—if I sent a messenger—?" Katherine began, feeling her own affairs very small indeed in the midst of this war's concerns, but resolved just as stubbornly upon a glimpse of Jeffrey.

One of the unshaven young men made her a merry bow and tapped himself upon the chest.

"I, myself, will use the legs of wire for you," he declared. "Mademoiselle must not forget the invention of the telephone—although now it is denied to all but the military." Taking her name and her address at the farm and the Captain's name and company he bade her rest assured that the Englishman would receive a message and would come to her—if the confounded Boches did not attack again.

"They give us no rest, those fellows!" he declared cheerily.

"Monsieur 'l'Officier should take it when he can," madame observed maternally.

The young fellow smiled at her with that touch of charming democracy which makes the French the most fraternal of aristocrats.

"When life is so short—!" he said gayly. "One must laugh when one can." Then as if that called too much attention to the real aspect of affairs he observed that doubtless a divine destiny had intended him to

await their arrival and he gave them the password, without which they could not have passed the sentry on the way to the farm, and waved away their volume of united thanks.

So, taking leave of the friendly officers and the kindly mayor, the two women set out, trudging through the darkness along the old highway to the farm, where an amazed Marie, with a neighbor woman for company and possible aid, welcomed them with surprised and touching joy, overlaid with anxiety.

"Thou shouldst not have come—not when the Germans are so near. Thou dost not know what happened at Armande where they stayed for two days. And——"

"It was my home before it was thine," returned madame tranquilly, "and these many days I have wished myself within it. . . . If the Germans come an old woman is better for safety than a young one, but they are not coming this way again. We shall see no more of their faces. . . . Moreover Jean is my son as well as thy husband and it is in my heart to behold him again while he is near. . . . Also I love thee and thou needest me. . . . Did they eat *all* the pigs? And what of the cows?"

That night Katherine lay again in the little upstairs room which brought back to her so vividly the hours of her betrothal night. It seemed to her to be years ago, and she remembered the beauty of that June night and the radiant happiness of her heart as touching fragments of some old dream. . . . And then again it was the dream which was real and this harassed life with

its knife-edge of uncertainty seemed the unreal dream. And most unreal of all to be in this soldier-invested countryside, listening to the steady roar of distant guns and straining her ears for the sound of hoofs upon the road.

She told herself that it was impossible that he could come so soon. He was distant at the château; he had orders to fulfill, undoubtedly, or he was taking a much-needed sleep. He might not be able to see her all the next day. . . . She resolved to set out upon that château road as soon as it was light, risking the sentries and detention. . . . She must get to him; he could not come to her. Yet, though common-sense reasoned thus and she acceded she did not sleep and she did not wholly undress, but lay there upon the bed, her casement windows wide to the cool air, her senses quickened to all the noises of the night.

When after midnight she heard the clatter of hoofs drawing nearer and nearer—just as some deep unreasoning presentiment in her had told her that she would—she would not admit to herself that it was Jeffrey, withholding her heart from the joy of a hope whose reversal would betray it too utterly. . . . Not even when the hoofs turned into the farm road, when they slackened at the gate, would she say more than, "He has sent a letter—a messenger."

But kneeling at her window, searching the shadowy gloom for the horseman, she called, "Jeffrey?"

And the call came back, clear and near, ringing with gladness, "Katherine!"

But it was not real, no, not even when she was down

the stairs and out the door and gripped in his eager arms. It was a dream, a wonderful dream, from which she would surely waken. . . . But, Oh, the strength of those arms about her again after the weeks of fear, the delight of his kisses and his dear cheek again on hers!

Then she held him off to look at him through the faint starlight. . . . He was thinner and older and grimmer and his skin was a red-brown except where the freshly shaven cheeks told of a once-protecting beard. There was a flesh-wound healing across his left cheek-bone which her fingers touched with light, exploring pity.

"Sound as a nut," he declared to her quick rush of anxious question, "and tough as—as a bullet, darling! . . . But, sweetheart, is it really you?"

He held her close as if he would never let her go, and her arms reached and clung about his neck. In that long kiss of young love their spirits seemed to breathe and mingle. . . . She knew a speechless happiness that was beyond all remembrance of the past, beyond all dread of the future.

But through his eager gladness his anxiety cut quickly.

"How did you come? They should not have let you. The Germans are so near. . . . They have been holding their own too well and stiffening the line—we're afraid of another attack. You must get away at once, dear, at once!"

"The nurses are in town—I can stay and help them," she protested, "and to be near you——"

"Near me this moment only—to-morrow I may be

twenty miles away. This is our first bit of rest and it won't be long—it's just drawing breath to get on with. . . . You don't know what this is like. You must get out of it. I couldn't bear to think of you as near."

Over his young face she saw fresh-graved lines that aged his merry youth. "You don't know what we've seen," he said fiercely, "up there—in Belgium. . . . The women—the civilians—Oh, there are no words for that hell. . . . You go back. I won't have you anywhere near. For one decent man there are a hundred savages. I've seen things that—that——"

He broke off, breathing heavily. "But, by God, Belgium won't be their slaughter-house forever! We're in this to the finish."

"Oh, Jeffrey, you'll be—careful?"

The futility of that womanish plea was painfully clear to her even as she cried it.

Wryly he smiled and answered lightly, "You must tell that to the Boches, dear! Their 'Jack Johnsons' are so deuced promiscuous!"

Then his voice grew earnest and reassuring. "You mustn't worry, Katherine girl. With your love to guard me there *cannot* anything happen! Somehow I'm sure. . . . You don't know how I've thought of you—even through the fight back there. And I thought of all our plans for my leave——"

"If I could only have had a line," she whispered. "You don't know what it was—that waiting."

"I did write—didn't a thing reach you? I scrawled twice—one note I sent back after Mons by a stretcher-bearer who was going to a base-hospital, I remember.



She held him off to look at him through the faint starlight."

Poor chap must have lost it—or been hit. But even if you don't hear you're not to worry. These aren't good postage days."

"Worry!" she said chokingly, her arms tightening.

"I'll get through, all right," he told her, looking down into her upturned face and stroking back the fluttering hair from her brow. "You'll see, darling! And all our dreams will come true for us—every one."

"You're all my life," she whispered.

"And you mine."

All too swiftly the minutes passed, sometimes in murmured speech, oftener in silence. The pain of parting pressed quickly upon the gladness of meeting, and at last, like a knife in her heart, came his reluctant words. It did not seem that he had been there any time, and yet the sky was lightening to that pale gauzy gray in which stars fitfully withdraw.

"I must go," he said at last, his arms holding her close for one last clasp.

She raised a tear-wet face. She did not know that she had been crying, so quietly those tears had overflowed. A moment more they had together while he tugged at a saddle-strap and she stroked the muzzle of his friendly horse, then a last kiss and he was in the saddle and off, and she was standing in the road for her heart to catch and hold the last impression of the shadowy, galloping figure.

"My dear love," she was saying chokingly to herself. "My dear, dear love."

How loud those guns were sounding! Roaring, roaring. . . .

## CHAPTER XXI

SHE seemed scarcely to have fallen asleep before she awoke to a world of noise. The air was racked with dull, throbbing detonations that came at rhythmic intervals, and shaken with sudden, irregular, sharper shocks.

The guns were closer. She was not afraid for herself; she did not know enough to be afraid, but she thought of Jeffrey and wondered fearfully if this meant another battle that he must be in, and thought how weary he had looked and how much sleep she had caused him to lose.

The sky was light but day had not yet come and everything stood defined in the clear, shadowless distinctness of before-dawn. She could see the dewdrops brimming on the trees and the blades of grass. The world before her window was empty of any sight more hostile than a white rabbit taking an early nibble, with a wary eye out for the family cat.

She dressed and hurried downstairs to find the Bonnets already about, with a breakfast prepared. The neighbor woman had gone over the fields to her own place, much nearer the town, but the Bonnets were not

prepared to move yet for the mere sound of guns. Yet their nerves were beginning to jump at the constant shocks and they ate hurriedly, going often to the door to look out.

"They are closer—closer," said madame anxiously.

As the three stood clustered in the low doorway there came a crack and a whipping tongue of beautiful blue smoke—and a tree in the roadside lashed its branches frantically in the hurricane breath.

"Oh, *maman*, it is here!"

"Be quiet, Marie. We will descend to the cellar, if necessary. Eh, but our men are coming back—look what they are about."

Down the white road toward them a group of men came galloping, bringing a small gun. Off the road they turned, hurrying behind the masking row of trees, and wheeled the gun into position. One gunner turned and seeing the women shouted a hoarse warning, his teeth flashing white in his blackened face.

"Get back to town—they are attacking!" Then he whirled to his work.

Katherine watched them curiously. This man was sighting his barrel, swinging it back and forth to make sure of its smoothness, while another placed in readiness the belts of cartridges on which the automatic fed. Another, his glasses raised, was watching some spot for a signal. He raised his hand.

She watched for the smoke. None—nothing but a little flicker of red like the dart of a garter snake's tongue, and the thir-r-r, thir-r-r, of the rapid spinning of the tape through the cylinder. . . . Somewhere, miles

away, over the hill on an unseen enemy those bullets were raining.

The man with the glasses was looking again, then he turned to the gunners with a rapid transmission of the signals for correcting the range and the man adjusted the elevation. Again the raised hand—the rapid whirling of the cartridge belt.

It did not seem to her like a gun. It did not seem to her like war—this little group of men behind trees, the distant directions, the unseen enemy. She wondered where the rest of the French were.

One of the artillerymen came running up to fill their canteens. His hands were black and greasy like polished ebony and Katherine stared as she hurried to wait upon him.

"You must go," he repeated. "They are getting the range—your farm will go—like that!" He snapped the black fingers.

"It is my home," said madame, "and there is always the cellar."

"A bomb may dig you a bigger one," he retorted. "The way to the village will soon be unsafe. . . . Must it take a bayonet to prod you?"

"No—no—let us stay," Marie was begging. "I cannot leave—I am not well enough for that walk."

"You will never be any better than now," returned madame, but her expression was dubious. Neither woman could bear to leave the home and its possessions.

Suddenly from the fields on their left came a crackle of rifles like a rattle of drums. Katherine ran out the door to look, and high overhead she caught a dark

shadow against the cloudy sky. An aeroplane of the enemy had drawn the fire of a masked battery. The next minute, it seemed to her, something dropped into those fields. She saw a flash of flame and a blur of dark fragments rising in the air—then another flame and flash. The smoke was black, heavy.

The crackle of bullets was steady, now, slitting the air, and suddenly the girl was conscious of a new sound, a whiz and hum like a swarm of bees high in the air—a whistle—a wish-sh——

Bullets were coming now as well as going. The enemy there to the left was not far away. She thought of Jeffrey with his men at the château and wondered what part they were taking in this.

An explosion that made her head jerk as if it would snap off her neck—and the wind in her face of a shrapnel shell that struck six hundred yards away. . . . And beyond that the blue clouds of other shrapnel, leaping out of nothing. . . . And she remembered that there are two hundred and fifty bullets in a shrapnel case and they carry forward and kill everything for twenty yards ahead and ten yards at the side.

She had read this in a Paris paper some weeks before and she now saw the paper distinctly before her vision, the unwavering print with its careful numerals.

She tried to remember what she had read about bullets. There was something about a short hum and a long hum—one meant that the bullet was far and the other one near, but here the facts eluded her. She could not bring the phrases to mind. It seemed to her terribly important about those long and short sounds.

"I should have remembered that," she said frowningly.

She had a tense, high-strung feeling of excitement. "This is actually under fire," she thought, and recalled the words of the youth at the Express Office that mobilization day in Paris, "Why, I wouldn't have missed it for anything. This is an *experience!*"

She was back in the shelter of the doorway now with no memory at all of her flying trip to it, and down the road a streak of artillerymen were galloping, bringing more guns, and over to the right, across the fields, zigzagged a line of moving objects like ants, except that they flashed red in the rising sun.

"Oh, those trousers!" she heard herself saying.

Within the house Madame Bonnet was moving briskly, making hurried bundles.

"Too late is never too well," she uttered sententiously. "Take this, Marie, that is enough for thee. Mademoiselle, will you put these in your case? And these? For myself, you see——"

For herself she had an enormous bundle of linens and household goods swelling out a sheet which she cumbersomely strapped to her shoulders as she marshaled them to the door.

"The stable is on fire," she remarked calmly. "It came when that monster noise broke the glass. Well there are no beasts left to save. That man told the truth. We must go before it is too dangerous. . . . It is no time for tears, Marie. The farm may stand. But we must make sure of what we can—and of ourselves."

She was a figure of dignity, even with that huge

bundle upon her shoulders, as she stood at the threshold of her old home, taking what might be her last look upon it. Her eyes were bright and tearless, and her deep-lined features unrevealing. Only the breath tearing its way painfully through her restricted throat betrayed her.

"*Maman*, the cat!" cried Marie pitifully.

"I'll take him in a pillow case," Katherine volunteered.

Madame considered. "He would run from the village —back here. No, he will hide from the noise and hunt mice till we come again. Adieu, poor beast. . . . On our way."

The little group set out into a world on which a pale dun sun was rising, a world shaken and racked with inhuman, ear-splitting noises. As they took the path on one side of the road Katherine glanced back, beyond the farm to the wooded slopes of a hill—her hill and Jeffrey's. That Sunday there had been the last of June. . . . And now it was early October, and on the hill the trees were shedding their dry and yellow leaves. . . . But what changes in their lives! Jeffrey in arms facing the enemy—and she, trudging along the path with the French refugees . . .

For a minute the tenacity of the past order made the present remote and unreal. Then a wave of fear brought the reality home again to her with secret panic. Thurish-h—thurish-h—thur*eesh*—a shell went screaming overhead. She did not see where it struck; she did not see that it struck anything, but her nerves started from the stunned acquiescence of the day and began to

dance. The enemy were getting the range; it was not the masked infantry that drew this fire; it was these hidden guns, this advancing column of men. . . .

Thurish-h—thurish-h—thur*eesh*. Another and another.

She gripped Marie's arm tightly, urging her to haste. After them Madame Bonnet trudged in hard-breathing silence. Katherine's throat was dry; she felt weak and shaky. She wanted to run. The whine of a spent bullet in her ear made her dodge in futile panic. She thought, "Any moment—any moment——!"

For a time those seemed the only words of her consciousness, then she began to wrangle angrily with her fright. "What do the men do in the fields? They face this—they aren't all killed!" But a voice in her answered that these men were sustained by the heat of battle and the intense demand upon their activities; they were not trudging along a muddy road with two foolish women who had so weighted themselves with household goods that they resembled a rummage sale! She felt an insane desire to laugh as she remembered that she had offered to lug the cat.

In her inmost soul she would have been glad to take her heels and race down that road, but shame restrained her, and on she marched in a cold and horrid fright. When she spoke, which she did encouragingly to Marie, she was surprised at the strength and calm of her own voice. It sounded as usual. She seemed to be acting as usual.

She had no memory of that road. It stretched on and on, forever and forever. Sometimes they abandoned it

to advancing troops, and took to the fields. Vaguely she remembered a trench, hastily dug, veiled with branches from the enemy's observations from above, being fortified with guns. She remembered smoke that curled out of a distant row of trees and minute flashes of red light. . . . Her head and neck were aching from their spasmodic jerks and she had bitten her cheeks and tongue in the sudden crashes of guns. She began to chew on a piece of her handkerchief as she had seen men chew on cigars.

And then they had crossed the little stream and gained the village and a blessed sense of haven reached enveloped her. The gray walls looked safe and sheltering, and no shells were dropping there as yet.

Madame Bonnet took refuge with some friends in their little shop upon the main street. Here no one knew any more than the Bonnets what was happening for all that could be sure was that the Germans were suddenly advancing and the French and English were out there to hold them off. There was talk of reinforcements that were expected.

"It was like this before—but they did not come," a woman assured madame.

From the door Katherine could look out into the square where she had seen those sleeping soldiers last night about their fire. The cobblestones looked very hard. They must have been tired to sleep! From out the church's wide doors the village priest came into the square to help bring in the bedding for the hospital improvised there, and she saw the nurses appear at intervals. Once she went forward and spoke to the slender

one whose satchel she had carried, offering to help, but aid was not yet needed, the nurse told her and Katherine returned to the villagers.

It was a day of interminable hours. At first the women talked bravely and hopefully. Les Buissons had been saved before when all the countryside had been overrun; and it would be saved again, for their men would hold the woods and the protecting loop of river. Nothing in it had yet been hurt, although the shells began to drop into the village. A small fire or two, or a roof did not matter. The shells would stop. So they encouraged one another.

Then subtly, stealthily, the secret reaction set in. It was hard to tell just when it first betrayed itself, in the louder assumptions of confidence and the repetitions of good hope. Perhaps it came with the first sight of the men returning from the front, limping, dragging themselves painfully, or carried in stretchers. The anxiety was acute for the village men were in the defending company in the trenches, and the women ran out from doorways to greet the wounded and when the rattle of the gray ambulance motor sounded they swarmed after it to peer in the open back for a familiar form among those stretched in the shelf-like bunks.

Sometimes the onlookers turned silently away; sometimes there would ring out a cry of "Jean!" or "Jacques!" and the women would follow after the motor to learn the danger of the wound. At times they did not need to ask—a leg gone or an arm wrenched off at the socket enlightened at first glance.

With the wounded came the trickle of individual news.

The Boches were coming on incessantly; they were charging here; their guns were hammering there. They had crossed the distant river in the face of deadly fire, and charged the trenches with a rain of hand grenades and liquid fire so terrible that all men in one trench were burned to death. A drop blinded. . . . It did no good to kill those Germans; for every company that went down there were two to follow. They thought nothing of men. They had them to throw away like grains of sand.

So the stories came, brought by those bloodied, dust-caked lips.

The shells were falling now with thundering regularity. One fell upon the roof of the new inn and there was no more inn, only a crumble of débris under which the bodies of the proprietor and his wife and children were pinned. His old sisters began to dig frantically among the bricks, crying aloud and listening for muffled words.

People were staring at each other with frightened eyes. Still they talked hopefully. Their men were out there; they would soon stop this. But the shells fell thicker and thicker and the buildings shook with the deafening roar and the window glass shivered and crashed and still the gray rumbling motors brought in the wounded from the front.

Now the hospital was being moved. The shells seemed to have concentrated upon the church for one-half the roof was gone and many of the wounded killed. Hastily the motors rushed their shattered freight farther from the danger zone and carts and stretcher-

bearers followed, bringing what they could. One surgeon's motor made the trip again and again, till the last man was out.

Later a cart came slowly down the road from the firing line, loaded with huddled men, with others clinging to the sides and back painfully dragging themselves along. In the village square the priest sorrowfully pointed down the road in the direction the hospital had taken and the cart creaked slowly on, its axles complaining, but not a groan coming from its occupants, while many of the hangers-on gave up and followed the priest into the nearest house for what care they could get.

It had been raining for some hours and though the heaviest downpour had ceased the air was a dreary drizzle of rain.

On and on went the terrible pounding of the guns, but the shells did not seem to be directed against the village but were bursting just ahead where the trenches were and the guns. Katherine ceased to jump and quiver at each shock and roar; she felt a stunned and heavy feeling of insensibility. There was no pretense of encouraging talk among the people now; they waited in stolid silence, dumb with apprehension and foreboding that grew keener from moment to moment. Their men were losing. They felt it, they knew it, and they waited, speechlessly, for the event.

The order to fall back had been given and back through the streets came the men at a forced march, dogged and silent.

The gazing women knew then and their hearts sank. A few ran out into the road and followed the soldiers.

Katherine ran out, too, to bring food to the stragglers and question them, but they knew nothing except of their own pocket of the fight. They were ordered to fall back—that was all. The guns and the cavalry would hold off the enemy as long as possible. But if only they had been allowed to go forward and charge——!

The rain was ceasing, but the sky was still heavily clouded, dull and dark, and through the dusk that was like the dusk of twilight the men marched, a long and weary stream, wet and cold, disheartened by their orders, sick at the outcome of events. Retreat, even a strategic retreat, was bitterness. And there was too intense a familiarity in this order to fall back. They had only begun to advance. Now their progress appeared unreliable and transient. Retreat was the only substantial and enduring thing in a world of disaster.

So they marched, hurrying, haphazard, lines and lines of men, and out in front the guns spoke fiercely and the distant racket of rifles rang. Then for a time the streets were empty and the people huddled in the doorways, munching bread and looking out and waiting, till a fresh onslaught of shells drove them within again. Children began to cry with nervousness at the incessant noise, and anxious mothers, huddling in the basements, tried to quiet them and told them frightening tales of how still they must be if the Boches came, with never a sound to betray their hiding-places!

Katherine clung to the doorway, staring out, and whatever spark of hope she still cherished went cold at the sight of the retreating guns. They were brought

back at a gallop, the men lishing the horses through the stony streets. Gun after gun rattled past and still Katherine waited, her heart pounding with suspense and fear. Surely Jeffrey's men must come this way! Or were they circling about on distant roads, lined for a desperate last stand——?

A sudden thought took her across the square to the church. There was a stairway to the bells, and a tiny place to look out. Strange she had not thought of it before! She sped through the empty building where abandoned bedding and the smell of ether told the story of its recent occupancy, and hurried up the old stair, straining her eyes down the wide roadway.

The shells had stopped. The world seemed suddenly strangely quiet and still.

It was dark down there and the trees threw such shadows. . . . But out there, no, those were not shadows in the road, but moving men—that road was all men. . . . And there, beyond, across the fields—those creeping lines—those were men, too. . . . Dim, green-gray, indistinguishable from the dusk, except for their movement, they were coming—the Germans.

Her hands turned cold. Her heart beat as if it would burst her side. She turned to warn the people below but her eyes still clung to those dim, swarming fields.

And then, just outside the village, at the road's angle with the little stream, she saw another line of moving figures emerge from the shadows of the trees and suddenly sweep away toward the first detachment of the oncoming swarm. An instant more, and a din of noise was borne up to her through the air that had been so

still—shouts and cries, yells and gunshots and the screams of horses all mingled in a fearful babel.

She could not see; she strained her eyes in vain. Only dimness and indistinguishable confusion. What was there? Was that the English cavalry, in a desperate sally against the first of the enemy? Had they been intercepted in a too-delayed retreat? . . . A bugle was sounding wildly. . . . And then came the clatter of hoofs on cobblestones and she saw horseman after horseman dashing through the streets and many a riderless horse with them.

She leaned over the rail of her balcony. There were men in khaki, riding with reckless desperation. There were not many of them. And then came a last group that swung about in the square and swept back down the street again, a reckless handful gaining a few minutes for their comrades at a terrible sacrifice. . . . Where was Jeffrey among them? Was he there at all? She could have sworn that that figure she had glimpsed on the big black was he—but in the confusion her overanxious eyes might be mistaken.

Tense and rigid she waited, listening to the shock of an encounter just beyond the corner, and then one horseman came tearing back through the square, and then others, in twos and threes, riding for their lives, and after them a molten mounted mass of men, helmets glittering, lances striking, hoarse German cries sounding as they bore down upon the last of the little band of English who had so daringly waylaid and attacked them. And behind them more Germans and more and more. Like a whirlwind they swept through the square

and on up the street, the racket of their hoofs dying abruptly as the cobblestones ended.

Sick with fright she clung to the railing, then turned and stumbled down the stairs and through the church to the outer doors. A horror of foreboding was upon her.

Even in those few minutes the scene had changed. The square lay utterly silent, and motionless, deserted of the wild life which had poured through it. For a moment she thought it empty, except for that horse writhing there horribly, and then as her eyes swept its shadows she saw those dumpy figures, huddled, inert and motionless where they had been flung, like sacks tossed from some cart. . . . She stared at them in horror, and then a limp outflung arm caught her eyes—and all the icy blood seemed driven back from her heart as she saw that long, thin figure lying there unstirringly.

And in the very moment that she saw him, she saw something else that burned the ice from her veins and poured the fury of the tiger mate into her. From out the shadows ahead a green-gray figure straightened from one of the immovable forms. The gleam of the bayonet in his hand lit up that scene for her in a flash of lurid lighting. The man moved to the next figure. Out the door she went on flying feet; she caught up something—what she never knew, a brick, a rock, a bit of gun—and launched herself upon him as he stooped. She seemed to crash through space, striking furiously at something that went down before her. . . . She heard a grunt. . . . And then she staggered up and then the man rolled over and lay still. As she bent over him

his stertorous breathing was not more uneven than her own.

Back to Jeffrey Edgerton she flew; she flung herself upon his body, not stopping to know if he were dead or alive; she knelt and clutching his shoulders she dragged him up on her strong young back and staggered, reeling, to the nearest doorway. . . .

Back in the empty shop was a closed trapdoor. She pounded on it and as it was not locked, she pried it up and called gaspingly into the blackness, crying that she had an English officer there that she must save.

"Quick, quick," she sobbed down into that darkness.

From the depths below a ladder reached out, and an old man's head appeared. She flew back to Jeffrey and together they bore him down into the safe gloom of that cellar and closed the hatch again and hid the ladder.

Into the farthest recess of the place they dragged him, where some women were huddled with their children. He was breathing heavily; now he began to moan. She bathed his temples with the water the women gave, and held some to his lips as his eyes opened. He drank gaspingly, then his head fell back against her arm.

"It's I—Katherine," she whispered.

Dazedly he accepted the miracle. For the moment it seemed enough to him to comprehend that he was safe with her, hidden and secret, and that for all the heaviness and aching of his head, the fall had not cut it nor broken any bones. He lay there quietly, like a child, his head in her lap, his hand clasping hers in the darkness.

Beside them the old man and the women were working

through an aperture they had made in the wall where they had dug out a little den where they might hide. Now they were working the harder to make it large enough for the English officer to rest in comfort and the simple friendliness with which they shared their hiding-place and their food and drink with two strangers went to Katherine's heart.

For all the fear of those furtive moments she knew a deep, fierce gladness. Jeffrey was safe and she had saved him. The passion of the primitive mate beat strong in her; she crouched over his head with eyes that searched the darkness for the first hint of danger. For this, she felt, she had waited in Paris, she had come to Les Buissons, had watched that village street.

Her man was safe and she had saved him.

## CHAPTER XXII

THEY had moved into the den hollowed out behind the wall, replacing enough bricks to leave only a tiny aperture. And in this cave they crouched, hour after unending hour, while over their heads sounded the din and confusion of the victorious army. There were shouts and lusty singing, endless marching of endless feet, trampling of horses, clatter of wheels, and rumble of guns. Straining their ears they tried to distinguish the sounds that came down to them.

Once the trap was lifted. Through the chinks in their loosely piled bricks they saw the pale light of a lantern lowered into the cellar, while a voice called out in German to know if there were anyone there. Behind their flimsy barricade they sat motionless, the children dumb, with their heads buried in their mothers' laps, not a whimper betraying them. The lamp was withdrawn.

"A rat in a trap," Jeffrey muttered restlessly. With his returning strength came bitterness at the fate which penned him here, a helpless fugitive from his enemies, unable either to fight or fly.

His practical mind busied itself with the problem.

Give himself up—never! Skulk here until starved out? Make a dash for it under cover of dark and be shot? ... He put a hand to his bruised head, shaking it angrily, deeply chagrined at his predicament.

For Katherine his anxiety was sharper than for himself. He begged her to hide herself, to trust no one. Memories of Belgium tortured him. He could only hope that the Allies would come again with those reinforcements which had been delayed.

For long, long hours they huddled there, speaking in whispers, their hands locked. . . . Everything that she had ever felt for him seemed poor beside the flood-tide of this feeling

At last he slept and gratefully she sat there, pillowing his head, cramped and stiff, but flooded with the ecstasy of his safety. Sometimes she, too, dozed, her head drooping against the earth wall, her weariness unmindful of cramp or discomfort

From such a nap she roused with a start. The noises overhead which had been quieter had broken out in louder force. There was an uproar of sound, a crackle of rifles, a crash of blows, of falling weights, a trampling of feet. She heard human voices, shouting and yelling, and the earth shook with the jarring crash as of two armies coming together.

Jeffrey was alert, rigid with excitement.

"By God, they have come back—it's a night attack!" He scratched a match and peered at his watch. "Two o'clock. . . . The boys are up there. They've taken them by surprise. . . . Let me get out of this."

"Wait—wait!" she implored, and in desperation she

urged the only plea that could stay him: "If you go up and fight them now they'll think it is a civilian and if they hold the village they'll burn it in revenge. Wait till you are sure. You must!"

"I'll make sure—but I must go, dear. . . . I'm myself, now. I must go."

The earth was shaken with the jar of feet. Up in the darkness above them a wild fight was on.

Jeffrey was out in the cellar and searching for the ladder; when he found it Katherine pressed on up after him, hoping and fearing. The hatch had not been replaced and they saw that the room above them was dark. Cautiously they raised themselves into it, finding abandoned blankets and other bedding in their way, and stole to the open door. Out in the street through the darkness a line of shadowy figures was racing, stopping to turn and fire and then tear on again. Back of them a bugle rang.

"Our call—our call!" Jeffrey crouched forward, his lean body strained and tense. "They're still coming, girl, they're coming—a night charge. . . . Do you hear that yell? . . . The Guards are with them. . . . Oh, if I had a horse, a saber! . . . Do you hear them, do you hear?"

Wild-tongued on the night, like a pack of hounds in cry, came the swelling sound again, deep-throated, triumphant, the human cry of man hunting man. Into the square swept the ranks of mounted men, driving out the last of those firing shadows, and as the square filled there came a crackle of rifles and a rain of fire burst down upon the invaders from the windows where a band

of Germans had waited in ambush. The screams of horses answered, shrilling over the shouts of men, and in plunging confusion the crowded ranks wheeled and reared while the slaughter went on Men flung themselves from their horses and tore into the buildings while fresh cavalry poured into the square and surged on after the flying Germans.

Jeffrey turned to Katherine. "Good-by, my girl, good-by."

"Oh, Jeffrey, no, no, no!" It was a cry of sheerest terror. Her arms clung tensely to him to hold him from that pandemonium of death.

Once more he kissed her. "Be brave, dear. I'll come back to you again," and with a quick, tight clasp, a last hurried kiss, he was out the door and catching at the bridle of a riderless horse. . . . She heard his voice ringing out in the shout for a sword and then he was lost to her in the mob of men.

All that night the Allies came, pouring back through the village, and by morning fresh troops were still coming and spreading fan-like across the fields and hills, and all morning the deep, shaking detonations told of the greeting of the guns that awaited them out there. A great battle was on.

Back to their homes crept the people, back to the shell-ridden ruins that had been homes, and at dawn Katherine was following them pitifully about, helping where she could, carrying tired babies, soothing little children. The sights she saw tore at her very heart.

She had not seen Belgium and it seemed to her that she

was looking upon the deeps of desolation. The death that she had seen before had been death in a casket with the scent of flowers, the sound of music and all the softening tenderness with which love surrounds the last visible moments of the body. But now she saw men dead in the streets, stiff-legged, grotesque in their last agonies, bloody and staring-eyed—and she saw the scattered remnants of what had been men the night before and now were sickening horrors to be pitched into a wagon and carried to a lime-filled trench.

At the end of one street the girl leaned against a house, shaken with a paroxysm of nausea.

A woman passed her, searching the ruins. Suddenly she ran into one débris pile and brought out some bits of yellow crockery. She turned to Katherine.

"That was my jug." And then she stood silent, staring. Presently she crept to the broken threshold and sat down, leaning against the charred door-frame, the broken pieces in her lap.

"If I could paint her so," thought Katherine, "if people would only *see* this war——!"

Later when she had seen the body of an old man, strangled in his barn, his face a bloodied bruise, she knew that no pictures could ever tell the story. But she felt that whatever talent was hers was consecrated to the one purpose of trying to tell it.

In one of the houses Marie lay very ill with her baby girl. Madame Bonnet had not hidden; she had met an intruding German at the door with a statement of the case and found the young man unexpectedly sympathetic. He had driven out some roisterers below-stairs

and written a notice that here a new-born babe was not to be disturbed.

"A very good young man," said Madame Bonnet. "He had sense and consideration. . . . Why should such people fight us, mademoiselle? Can they not be busy and happy at home?"

"They have a government of Cæsars," said Katherine bitterly.

"What a thing it is to have education!" commented madame.

For Katherine's narration of the events of her night she had an equable acceptance. "That is what it is to have presence of mind! I hope you killed the assassin."

"He was breathing," said Katherine doubtfully. She had thought that she would feel strange to know that she had killed a man. To her amazement she was indifferent. He was a sickening vampire. She remembered that Jeffrey had said, "I hope you didn't kill him, dear," and she felt a flash of humor at the revelation. Men were like that—even in what they felt was righteous carnage they wanted their women's hands clean. . . .

In the church the Red Cross hospital had reëstablished itself, and men were out with stretchers and carts, bringing in the wounded. Beneath a fallen stone wall Katherine saw a mangled hand moving and she shouted at a man she saw hurrying across the square. He came quickly, a trim, spare little doctor, with thick-lensed glasses, and meeting the brown eyes back of them Katherine called him by name.

"Why, Dr. Thibault! You took care of Robert Mac-

Nare's little daughter. Do you remember me—the night of the croup?"

"Perfectly," he rejoined quickly, "but to find you here——"

His eyes were very questioning. That haunting thought of spies!

She told him how she came, and how the night had passed, while two men he called up were digging out the poor buried fellow below, a German, it seemed, who must have been caught by a toppling wall at the moment of retreat.

"Do let me help," Katherine besought, when the crushed lad was taken to the hospital. "You know that I can be of some help—and I can follow directions. I have been studying at those first-aid courses——"

He remembered her steady presence of mind with the child. "Come then. We are short-handed, and it may be you will be of use."

She found the same nurses there that had been there the day before. They had only retreated to the next village, and leaving the wounded they had brought to the care of other nurses there, these had come again, at the first permission, to establish a field hospital as near as possible to the firing line. The roof was being roughly protected and clean beds had been made up all over the church, and an operating-room arranged in the baptistry, but as yet there was small need of that. It had been a life or death struggle and there was more call for men with spades and quicklime than for surgeons.

All that day Katherine saw those wagons wending

their slow way along the fields; saw them halt and the drivers hand down the shovels and then the stiff logs of bodies; saw them begin to dig. . . .

And that was the end of them, of all that had been men, the end of their eager lives, their hopes, their ardors. . . . Butchered . . . hurled out of the world. . . .

There was a lump in her throat that never left. But she went very steadily about the work assigned to her, grateful for the interest of that pleasant nurse with the friendly eyes whose bag she had carried. Soon the ambulance from the front began to bring its human freight.

Nurses entering hospitals have a mercifully long time to become inured to the horrors of sickrooms, and only little by little are admitted to the full secrets of life and death. But Katherine took a baptism of fire. . . . In Paris she had seen much of the hospitals, but there it was illness in its bed, clean and decent, mercifully soothed and tended, and she had thought it pitiful enough, but now she saw the wounded coming in all the dirt and filth of battle, broken, bloody, battered, legs horribly dangling, wounds caked, eyes gouged. . . . To see it was to see into the heart of the hell of war.

"You are going to faint," said Sister Agnes suddenly. The girl looked at her with a wavering smile. "Why no!" And then the room turned very black, pricked with dancing red lights; she felt a hand on her elbow guiding her to the door and she clung to the doorway, fighting the suffocating darkness with all her might.

"If they can live it, can I not look on? I am all right," she insisted fiercely.

"Perhaps you have a heart trouble," said Sister Agnes.

Katherine shook her head. "It is just the sight——"

"I know," said the older woman quietly and left her. Presently she came back. "There is a boy here—an English boy. Both arms are gone. It is no use to amputate. Will you take a letter to his people?"

So that day wore on. By afternoon there were fewer and fewer men brought in. The battle had been pressed over the hill, beyond the woods, and the Germans were shelling the fields so fiercely that it was impossible to venture yet after the wounded. The men that had come knew nothing of any of the fight beside their individual confusion. They talked of charges met with bayonets, of hand to hand grapples with cold steel. "Not many coming from that field, nurse," one boy said with a bitter grin.

That afternoon Dr. Thibault came out of the operation-room looking as if he had come from a shambles. Behind him came Sister Agnes. The front of her uniform was sprayed with bright arterial blood. Her face was drawn and gray-white. She put down a bowl of bloody water with hands that sagged.

Katherine sprang for it. "Let me." Sister Agnes turned her face slowly till it was toward the doctor. She articulated "Digitalis," in a half-whisper, then quietly slid down on her knees.

Katherine flew to raise her, but the doctor's sharp prohibition checked her and sent her after the medicine.

He knelt quickly beside the woman, and she opened her eyes and her lips moved. He bent to catch the fluttering words.

"It was always bad—but I thought that it would be strong enough. I am sorry. . . ."

Sister Agnes was dead. The heart that would have been strong enough for years of quiet had not been able to meet the strain she had put upon it. . . . It had done all it could do for France.

"Folly," said the doctor very gently.

It was then that Katherine learned that Sister Agnes was the Baroness de Saronne. Her husband was dead and she had given herself to France. Somewhere at the front was her only son.

"Take her place, mademoiselle," Thibault concluded to Katherine. "You will find she has a clean uniform. Later we can regularize this, perhaps. Now we need you."

In the unaccustomed uniform of the dead woman, the sacred cross about her arm, Sister Katherine came into being.

The deafening roar of the guns had grown duller and duller as the battle pressed victoriously farther and farther on. Now, by late afternoon, the roar had become a rumble, infrequent and rhythmic, telling the listening ears at the village that the Allies were still pushing their battle-line. Hurriedly Dr. Thibault ordered the field wagon and the orderlies and stretcher-bearers, that had been so long in readiness, to proceed, and since another surgeon had come to assist him, he left the man in charge and went with the wagon.





"He will go under fire," said the infirmière major to one of her nurses, "yet in others he is severest on a folly. . . . Some day he will be brought back. . . ."

At the doorway he was surprised by a cloaked figure that came flying out of the shadow to meet him. Katherine had put on Sister Agnes' cloak and carried her emergency satchel. Brusquely he broke into her first words.

"We do not take nurses on the battlefields."

"I am not a regular nurse. I am not needed here now—and with you I can help. I can lift as well as a man."

"It is no place for a girl. Go back."

She looked at him with burning eyes. "If he is there I can find him. . . . If I do not go with you, I go alone."

"Are you serving France or your own affair?" he demanded.

"They are the same! I beg of you——"

"Get in, get in," he commanded testily. "Are you to keep us waiting till dark?"

Swiftly the wagon hurried on over the roads to the distant sound of guns. She did not know when they passed the Bonnet farm. There were no buildings standing to mark it. But she recognized the hill—her hill and Jeffrey's, and here the wagon left the road and pressed up over the edge where it could reach the scene of early conflict.

## CHAPTER XXIII

FROM the plain below the tide of battle had swept on and away, leaving, like the flotsam and jetsam of the tide, a stranded, crumpled wreckage of lives. It was a field soaked in blood and sown with human flesh, with limp bodies and arms and legs and heads, and fragments of raw meat that bore no resemblance to any part of humanity.

Here carnage had taken every form; huge pits of earth told of great shells, burying a score of men or blowing them to bits, and a spent rain of bullets told of furious rifle fire, while blood-soaked bayonets, some still clenched in the stiff hands, others upright in the flesh they had turned to clay, were mute evidence of frenzied hand-to-hand encounters, where men stabbed each other to the death.

Numbed and steeled to horror as Katherine believed herself to have become in those grim hours, this ghastly plain with its harvest of human hate and madness, seemed more than a heart of pity could endure. She was cold and sick as she hurried down after the doctor and the Red Cross men, but the thought of Jeffrey had power to nerve her on. It was into this field that he





had swept with the troops after leaving her, in the blackness of early morning; here he had battled and if here he lay hers was the determination to find him and bring him back to care and safety.

For many rods there were no wounded, only the dead, but farther on the men paused at the wreck of a battery where shrapnel had blown men and iron in a grisly mass of wreckage, and beneath a pile of débris a man was pinned, shrieking and giggling with the delirium of anguish. Another man was buried until only the head showed and beyond him a grotesque pair of heels protruded from the ground, where the explosion had buried a man head downward. . . . They dug him up. His face was hideous with strangulation.

As they went on into the plain its terrible secrets showed more and more, and the helpers were so few, so pitifully inadequate! From group to group they hurried, drawing the living from the dead, estimating the chances of life, sending back the lightest wounded and laying the others in rows to wait till help was practicable, quieting the worst agonies with precious hypodermics.

Katherine soon ceased to follow the doctor; she undertook her own explorations and moved from man to man, feeling herself a woman in the grip of a nightmare too terrible for reality. One part of her brain seemed frozen and numb—mercifully numb. She thought that if her brain performed its work, if she understood one-thousandth part of the horror and evil that she saw that she would go mad of it and die. She seemed to be two persons in one—the nurse, moving along that field, and

the other something aloft in the air, looking down on it all, suffering a heartache that was a devouring flame.

From one to another she went, stooping to wipe the filth from the lips of a boy who was dying, her sense straining to catch the broken French words he gasped. She wrote them down, with his number, then on to give a hypodermic to a man who lay bleeding, his abdomen torn out, his legs crushed. . . . It was only a matter of minutes now for him; he had known agony for hours. She brought water to the lips of a boy whose arms were crushed, and water and a cigarette to one with broken legs. There was so little that she could do. The wounded were few in comparison to the dead, the terrible dead, stiff and stark, with that grotesqueness which freezes the blood in the veins, denuded of their dignity, their sacredness, but all the more ghastly in effect.

Sometimes she found men who had applied the first dressing to their own wounds, and dragged themselves to a place of refuge, only to have been riddled with bullets by a counter-attack, or crushed in by the hoofs of another cavalry charge. Wheels of guns went over them; even their own troops had passed across their quivering flesh.

Often she stopped and picking a rifle from the ground put an end to the screaming agony of some horse. Once she found a man sobbing about a dead white horse, and he told her that he had raised her from a colt and that she had carried him to safety before she dropped. He added that he had a brother gone down a little farther on and his neighbors were all gone too. His own hand

was shot away and the stump tied with a dirty rag, but he did not seem sensible of pain, and said indifferently that he had tied the artery. He refused to go back in the direction she told him or let her take him, shaking his head wilfully at her and patting his dead beast. . . . She had to leave him there.

The sun was going lower and lower, sinking into a bank of cloud. It became necessary to go close to the shadows, and peer into the thickets to be sure that no form lay there. Looking back over her shoulder she found she had outdistanced the others; perhaps the doctor had gone to operate, leaving the stretcher-bearers to their carrying. Sometimes, when she wanted to make sure of their attention to an unlikely spot, she fixed a strip of white to some bayonet and let it flutter for them.

From one heap of mangled dead she heard a smothered groan, and dragged at the grisly figures to find who still lived there. From out the heap she saw a boy's face looking at her, his eyes bright with fever.

"Right-O!" he said cheerily. "I can't get out. Both arms are smashed I think."

Something caught at her heart; it was a moment before her numbed brain understood. He had spoken in English. She had come to the English companies.

As she tugged at the grim thing in a green-gray uniform that sprawled across him, she asked his regiment. It was not Jeffrey's. Jeffrey's must be still beyond.

"The rest of 'em went on across the field," said the boy. "They haven't been back. That was about sunrise." He had been lying there ever since.

Both his arms were helpless. She put her hand about his shoulder. "Do you think you can walk back, now?" she asked, "or can you if I help?"

She raised him to a sitting position. He stared frowningly at his own limbs.

"So that's it," he said slowly. She saw that one foot was hideously mangled; the other was queerly twisted. Silently she laid him back, and held a drink of water to his lips, then pinned a white flag beside him.

"I say, nurse." He looked up at her from the blood-soaked ground. His face was gray under the dried blood.

"You know I'm no use after this," he said quickly. "I'm done for—arms gone—legs. . . . I can't hold a gun or I wouldn't trouble you. But won't you please put a gun to my head? . . . Just pull. . . . It's simple. . . . You'd do it for a horse. . . . Then I shan't have to wait here—and afterwards——"

She shook her head helplessly, her eyes stung by the salt of tears she thought she had forgotten how to shed.

"You'd do it for a horse, you know," he urged, his eyes begging, like a pitiful dog's. "Come nurse— Oh, for God's sake! Just one pull—be a good fellow."

"You'll be glad I didn't," she tried to tell him, but the lie stuck in her throat.

Another voice called, a voice of fearful agony and delirium and she went to see what she could do there. Her morphin was giving out and now she gave only water from the canteens she found or a bit of food or a cigarette from some dead fellow's pockets. One poor boy, a German, tried to tell her something, but half his





jaw was shot away; she put a pencil into his hands and tried to help him trace the words he wished, but he died as he wrote, "Mein liebe——"

She put away the paper and his metal check of identification and a picture that he carried there of a young girl. Next to it was the framed map of Belgium that every German soldier carried and as she saw it and thought upon the thousand and thousand of such maps, ready for this invasion when the time was ripe, the misty sky seemed to turn red about her, and her blood burned. . . . But for this boy her heart was heavy. He had not craved a world empire, poor lad; his hopes had been of that girl whose picture he carried, and of a home and love and children. . . . But he had been nothing in the general scheme.

Through the waning light she flitted on and on, conscious of the two conflicting selves, the nurse that lingered at each form, the woman whose heart was hurrying with a sense of straining impatience. Now the men were all English and Germans—khaki and gray uniforms locked in desperate embraces.

"We gave 'em hell," one trooper gasped. "Are—they —coming—soon—nurse?"

Always she repeated that the stretchers would be there shortly, but she knew that she was far ahead of the relief work. She had wandered miles with no idea now of where she was. A bend in the fields had long hidden the first reaches of the plain from her, and now before her was sloping ground rising unevenly to a distant wood, crossed by a wandering stream marked by the ruins of a tiny hamlet and a broken mill. Not a creature stirred

in the desolation. Not a voice answered hers from those dark clumps of figures.

Here in the beet fields and on the banks of the stream the carnage had been terrible. And here she found the uniform of Jeffrey's Guards, and her dread spurred her on and on, up and down the rows of ploughed fields, over and over the muddy earth, through each thicket, each hedge, each shadowy tangle. She was not conscious of fatigue nor pain, although her feet were cut and her hands bleeding and her muscles wrenched from their heavy struggles with the wreckage.

Up the slope toward the wood she worked, her breath coming in heavy gasps as she hurried to outstrip the coming night. The bodies were fewer now. Here the Guards seemed to have triumphed and driven the enemy before them.

She stepped around a dead horse. It was not Jeffrey's and no premonition touched her. Then she saw a soldier lying on his back, his face to the dark sky.

She knew then that this was what she had foreseen, foreknown, and her heart seemed to stop in such an icy clutch of dread that she thought she would sink and die of her fear. But she found herself bending over him, speaking his name. . . . His eyes were closed; but his flesh was warm, even hot, though damp with the rain and wet of the soaked ground. His breast was soaked with blood.

She touched his head; there was no wound; the limbs lay unmangled. But from that hole in his breast the blood was welling, welling. . . .

She tore at her satchel for the flask of brandy she had





so jealously guarded and slipping her arm under his head she put it to his lips, letting a few drops run into his mouth and down his throat. . . . After a moment he swallowed. . . . Slowly his lips moved; his eyelids fluttered upward and he stared up at her with a gaze glazed and vague with pain. . . . Then she saw the flash of recognition, shot with incredulous joy and gladness even in the agony.

"Jeffrey," she said with a sob that shook her, "Jeffrey—you know me?"

"Katherine," he whispered faintly and tried to smile.

"Jeffrey, I've found you again—I'll take care of you—I'll save you," she promised, and her heart tightened and swelled with a desperate might of resolution.

A fluttering motion of one hand stirred to his chest. "They've got me—here," he said in that faint, husky voice, so weakly articulated that she strained her ears to hear. "The end—after all."

"No—no—no—not that!" Her voice rose on its lonely defiance. Then she calmed herself; she must not agitate him.

"Don't give up, darling, don't," she besought. "I'll take care of you—and help will come. I've found you and I'll keep you, love——"

She saw in his eyes an agony of pain and of pity for her.

"The end—not far off. I'm going fast, dear. . . . So glad you came—glad," he mumbled, feeling for her hands.

She had laid him back, shaking her head sharply to clear her eyes of the tears that were pouring. . . . She

was furious at them. What had she to do with tears? . . . She tore away his shirt. . . . She looked into the wound from which protruded the charred threads of his dirty uniform. The flesh was black and swollen, and from a low, three-cornered cut the drops of blood were oozing.

"It's choking me." He made a shaking gesture to his throat. "Can't breathe—worse all the time. . . . Nothing to do, dear, nothing to do."

The realization came to her that there was not. His lungs were shattered, flooding with blood. She looked at him one long minute, then rose to her feet and strained her eyes down into the field. If there were men in sight—if only a surgeon would come for that shattered breast. . . . Perhaps she ought to run and bring someone. . . .

But as she stared about that desolate country, remembering the lonely miles and miles that she had hurried, she knew that search was vain. It was folly. No surgeons would be there. He would not live to be brought to them. He would be gone before she got to them. . . . She need not leave him. There was no hope to urge her to that.

She stood very still, with the dying man at her feet. She did not want him to see her face, in that moment when the certainty of his death invaded her. Her heart ceased to resist its agony. . . . But all the time the utter impossibility of this thing's happening was beating wildly like a caged bird in her brain. Other men might die—had died like flies—but not her own. Not Jeffrey. All women thought like that—until the end came for

them. Now hers had come. She had found him only to lose him. The end of the world had come to them there on that French field.

To her mind it was absolutely unreal. But her heart knew.

There came a sudden calm of thankfulness that she had found him in time. This moment at least was theirs.

From another's canteen she brought him water, and gave him more of the precious brandy; then stanched his wound as best she could, and bathed his face and lifted his head into her lap as she sat down beside him, holding him so that he could breathe easier. She remembered that only last night she had held him, believing him safe then, snatched out of danger.

"Better," he said with his wan smile, and that look in his eyes that was only for her.

She fought against the despair that outfaced her.

"Live, Jeffrey," she whispered. "Live for me. . . . We'll pull through—somehow."

Faintly came the answer, after a long wait. "I—haven't—time—to pretend, dear. . . . No use." And she felt rebuked for the pitiful insistence of life before the great realities of death.

"Oh, my love, my love," she breathed in a quivering little voice that fluttered out between her lips from her breaking heart. "My love, my love."

He smiled up at her, then closed his eyes with a great weariness.

She was grateful that he did not seem to suffer. There was fever and pain in his chest and his breathing was heavy and slow, but his senses seemed mercifully dulled

by the shock. She shuddered to think what those hours had been for him. . . . And over her, like rolling waves submerging her agony and heartbreak, came the gladness that she had found him, that he was not to die alone upon the field of battle, but that her arms would hold him and her heart go with him.

It was very dark now. Into the fields below a white mist had stolen like a vaporous sea. The distant guns were quieter, and the rhythmic thunder had ceased to roll, but often she heard, far ahead at her right, the sudden scream of shrapnel and a faint popping of rifles.

But in all that dark land there seemed none living but herself and the man in her arms. . . . It was stark, unreal, ghastly—a mad scene in a mad world.

She was very quiet, very calm. If she yielded one breath to the emotion that beat in upon her she would go mad, she told herself; she must be quiet and live carefully these precious moments.

He was going fast. There was nothing to be done. She held his head higher and higher, against her breast. She bent her face close to his. She was afraid that he would go from her as he slept. With a woman's futile passion for farewells she roused him to garner every moment left of consciousness.

"Dear, was there anything—you want to send your mother?"

His eyes opened into hers. "Oh, yes, mother." He spoke with difficulty. "Go to her—tell her—everything. Say good-by—sorry. There's Fred left for her. . . . Love to them. . . ."



"'Live, Jeffrey,' she whispered, 'Live for me . . .'"





He stopped, then his voice came more clearly. "It's nearly on the clock for me, my girl. . . . Oh, Katherine, Katherine!" His eyes, agonized, hopeless, looked up into hers. "Is it possible?" he said wonderingly, and then, "All that was to be!"

Her mouth was on his brow. It was cold and damp.

"A kiss," he whispered, "My lips——"

Lightly, for fear of stopping his fluttering breath, she touched her lips to his. They kissed, their eyes on each other's, a passion of pain and heartbreak looking from soul to soul.

Then he threw back his head with sudden wildness, straightening convulsively in her arms.

"God—I'm dying!" His voice was thick. "All over —all—God! . . . We must win. . . ." He choked. A terrible rattle sounded in his throat. At his lips foamed blood and froth.

And then his eyes flashed up at her in a look of such agonized recognition that it seemed as if their spirits touched. And through all the agony was the smile that his eyes had ever kept for her.

"Dearest—good-by."

The light, the recognition, was gone—forever. The flame was out. And over the boy's features Death stamped his strange and inalterable seal, that gray imprint of the other world which makes remote, strange clay of the intimate flesh within our arms.

Fixed and sightless his glazed eyes stared into hers. His cheek grew cold against her breast. His fingers stiffened in her clasp. His own breast no longer panted

with its tortuous breath. The blood flowed no more but congealed in a heavy mass.

Her senses broke themselves against the truth, dashing her again and again upon the incredibility of her own woe.



## CHAPTER XXIV

STONILY she sat there like the last stricken figure of life in a world already dead.

She had not stirred when the blackness of midnight closed in about her. Suddenly the blackness was lightened by a faint glow reflected from far beyond the wood, and on the wind came the fearful odor of acrid flesh. An army was burning its dead.

She understood and her somber eyes could see those dead. And now she thought that her anguish was but the anguish of one woman and that this death in her arms was but the death of one man, and she thought of all the dead men in that pyre and all the dead men out in the night and of all the women who loved them, and her own grief seemed to grow and expand with the feeling of their pain, till the burden of it was greater than she could bear

Then an anger that was hot with all their angers, hot as the licking flames of that devilish holocaust, burned through her. She laid down her dead and rose to her feet, flinging back her face to that fire-tinged sky, her arms wide, her breast heaving. Hate was surging through and through her, a passionate hate of war, of

the conquest-war that made murder in this world, that spirit that grasped with mailed hands, that stabbed and crushed, that trampled right and liberty in the mire, that starved women and babies and befouled innocence and outraged helplessness. Empires—thrones—dominions—what rivers of forgotten blood flow underneath the rotting crust of their raped soils!

Her hate poured itself upon the war-spirit of greed and cruelty that set nation against nation and man against man, that made patriotism a lust for power and flung armies to the murdering and thieving that were dishonor to the single man . . . the cold war-spirit of scheming that moved men hither and thither, like pawns in a game, to change the color of the little maps of the earth they lived in . . . the spirit that sells its brains for blood money that more guns may deal more death . . . the spirit that has ridden down the world with Xerxes and Alexander and Cæsar, crucifying each Christ of pity. . . .

And as she stood there it seemed to her as if all the dead men of the night were standing, too, gathering from the field, their stark faces touched with new understanding, and their eyes ablaze with stern anger at the thing which had done them to death.

She could see them all about her, shadowy troopers, gathering and gathering, with here and there a face that she remembered—that of the boy who had begged her to kill him and the German with his jaw shot away and the French lad who had gasped of his mother—these, and all that she had seen that day pressed about her, a darkling





throng, their gray faces lifted to the sky, their eyes on fire. . . .

She thought how many had turned their faces to a mute heaven for justice. What God did they seek there, some kind God of their mother's prayers, or some defender to whom they had chanted war-like hymns? . . . What God could help them, except that God which was in their own hearts, that seed of pity, that divinity of love, which alone could comprehend and break the chain of human wrong and fearful habit! . . . The God of that love was in their churches and on their lips—a Krupp and Kaiser had prayed to him devoutly. Better to hang between dishonor at Golgotha than from an altar receive the homage of such prayers!

There in the dim sky before her, where that fearful glow had flickered and waned, high over that silent ghostly throng, it seemed to her that the Christ was hanging, gazing darkly down upon them, the pain of all the world in His face, the pity of it in His eyes. . . . And He was still upon His Cross, not risen in men's hearts. . . .

And then He was gone, as He had gone from the earth and the passion of men, and the wind swept suddenly through the plain like the flight of the souls of the dead, wailing aloud, bitterly wailing aloud. . . .

She was sitting again, with Jeffrey in her arms. There were stars out now, friendly stars of healing and compassion. She had no fear of that cold flesh she held—only of the time when she could never hold it more.

Again and again her lips touched its marbling stillness.

Down in the distant fields she caught the flicker of far-away lights, like ghoulish will-o'-the-wisps among the slain. They were the flash-lamps of some Red Cross aids, but she did not cry out. They would only take her from her dead and leave him there.

The sky darkened and the stars fled. It rained in slant and drenching torrents that soaked her to the skin. Bending above the dead man she tried to protect his poor flesh from the wet. It ceased and the air grew colder.

Slowly a gray and grudging morning forced itself upon the night. Slowly a wan light displaced the dark. A listless vapor rolled back along the plain. Everything stood distinct and gray, and then the color flickered into the east, a delicate infusion of pale pinks and blues and greens, mingling in a lovely gauzy dawn, and then like a rotund pursuer of some fragile girl in chiffons a hot sun panted up over the horizon and the pale colors fled. The clouds dissolved in pearly streamers, leaving a sky of fairest blue. A golden though not brilliant light bathed the whole plain, where rain and dew drops sparkled and every aspect of the morning exhaled innocent freshness and delight. In the woods behind the girl some little birds were faintly chirruping; suddenly they burst into brief riot of song.

Morning had come to the world with its resurgent life. Only the dead lay there, untouched by any day, incongruously terrible and unchanged.

Hours passed. The sun went under a cloud again; sometimes it rained. Sometimes she lay on the ground





beside the dead man, sometimes she walked up and down to fight the cramping stiffness. She drank water and ate biscuit from the knapsack of dead soldiers—but the food of an invader she could not touch. She watched for the ambulance corps but no one came.

Cannons were thundering to left and right and the faint screaming of shrapnel told her that the tide of battle had surged in again. Perhaps she was cut off from her lines. Once in the woods behind her the rattle of rifles sounded like the tap-tap-tapping of drums. She began to watch the wood but no one came out of it, only once a horse, limping wearily, a great hole in his side. She rose and shot him. Then she resumed her vigil with the dead.

Now the wind brought her tainted air. . . . She began to think of what she must do.

Even if the help came they might not spare time for this one poor corpse. They might burn the bodies or bury them in a common trench.

She walked into the wood and looked about. It was beautiful there, and peaceful. The fallen leaves lay in little damp drifts beneath the trees. Only the hoof marks in the ground told of a swift struggle and a flight and these the rains had half effaced. She found a soft place, beneath three trees, near a boulder of rock.

It was hard to stagger there with the dead man on her back but somehow she accomplished it, and with that desperation of strength given to supreme human endeavor she dug a grave. For long hours she toiled, with bayonets and helmets and her bare hands. . . .

Then she waited. She could not bear to lay away the last sight of her love.

At last she laid him down in it. She spread a handkerchief across the face; she laid a horse blanket for cover over his uniform. She wished there was a flag to wrap about him but no British colors were carried into the fields. . . . From the hands she drew a ring and a wrist watch as mementoes for his mother. For herself there was the signet ring which she had worn since that June day at Les Buissons. She put a ring of her own upon the dead fingers, and left a last kiss upon the lips and brow.

Handful by handful the earth was heaped. It was dark when all was done. Beside the mound she lay and looked at the trees and tried to fix the location unerringly in her mind, so that even if they were gone, some clue would tell her of this place. . . . By and by she rose and covered the grave with rocks and little stones.

And all her youth and joy were down there with him under the earth and stones. Her Jeffrey—dead.

They came in the dawn—two Red Cross bearers, and some power of astonishment was left in them for her story.

"But that is pitiable, mademoiselle," said the oldest, looking at her bleeding hands, her blackened, blood-soaked uniform. "To have found your lover—and buried him!"

With them she struggled back to the hospital. They were short-handed there. The Allies had been successful in driving back the enemy, but the Germans' shells still

reached them. A nurse had been killed before the church.

And suddenly it seemed to Katherine that she, too, need not have to wait very long with so much death about. It would only be hours, or days, . . . and then she would be out of all this. Meanwhile there was work.

Dry-eyed and utterly contained Sister Katherine went about her nursing.

## CHAPTER XXV

ONE two, three, four—she counted the steps gaspingly. She could manage four and then she must stop and wait. One, two, three, four —she began again.

A door opened below her and a step entered the hall, then someone came up the stairs behind her and a hand caught her elbow as she was clinging to the rail.

She found herself looking up through the dusk into the face of Robert MacNare.

"It's just—my knee—" she said weakly and sat down on the stairs.

He did not waste time in questions. "Let me take——"

"No," she cried irritably as he bent toward her. "I can—go on. I can."

He offered nothing more and when she was ready he helped her in silence. At her locked door she looked blankly up at him. "My keys—I forgot."

He drew out a key ring from his pocket and fitted one into her lock. "Madame Bonnet left hers. She is still away."

He opened the door and followed her as she limped

into the room, striking matches and lighting the lamp, and flinging open a window for the cool wind to come rushing into the airless place.

The girl on the edge of the couch shivered. "It's cold."

He closed the window and went to the hearth. Then he ran downstairs to reappear with the fuel for a fire which he promptly kindled. "And now for your knee," he said turning toward her again.

She sat unstirringly, drawing her cloak closer. For the first time he noticed what she wore and saw the Red Cross on her arm.

"It's bandaged—it's all right," she told him in her slow, tired voice. "But I walked home on it. And that hurt. And once I fell."

"Why? Why walk?" he said savagely.

"It wasn't—their fault. I insisted. I am well enough. But—I am tired now. And then the train. That was too crowded. All wounded."

"So you've been nursing all this month?"

"Yes."

He made no comment. He had not seen nor heard from her since that October morning when she had bade him a hurried farewell as she ran eagerly after madame on her way to the station. Now November was beginning.

"Dr. Thibault was there," she said suddenly. "He had the hospital. Wasn't that strange?"

"Yes. But you're too tired to talk," he answered, as she might have told one of her own patients. "Take off your things and lie down and when I come back I'll bring some more food and something to eat."

"You needn't. I'm quite right now," she said dully, but he made no response. And like an exhausted child she dropped back against the dusty gray and yellow cushions without stirring. For three weeks she had worked like some silent, tireless automaton; suddenly something had snapped. Her will flagged. The hurt to her knee—nothing serious, only a cut from a flying bit of wood—in depriving her of activity had deprived her also of that strange momentum of activity. She felt stopped. She felt as if she could never go on again.

Presently MacNare came back, and very quietly and matter-of-factly as if she were little Peggy, he set about making her comfortable, taking off her cloak and dusty shoes, bringing her wet towels and dry ones, finding a thick blanket to spread over her and building a bright blaze upon the hearth. From out her thin face, her big eyes followed him about with a dumb, sick wistfulness. There was comfort in the simple humanness of his presence. When he brought her a tray from a neighboring café she tried to eat and found herself hungry.

But the inevitable associations of that room were speaking to her. Through all her clogged and numbed exhaustion the realization forced itself home. She had not died out there; she had lived through days and nights of nightmare, and now she was here, quite well, but for that knee, quite young—and facing the life that was to be lived.

In her big, haggard eyes the weak tears suddenly brimmed. She looked up at him, one thin hand reaching pitiably to him from the blue blanket.

"He's dead. . . . He's dead. . . . They've killed him."

MacNare dropped into a chair beside her, taking that poor, clinging hand in silence. After these past weeks he had not thought that life could deal him further pain, but now it seemed that there were still quivering sensibilities for the ingenious devils to play on. . . . That she should not be spared! That she, of all brightness, should be broken on the wheel. . . .

The old rage welled in him; the muscles of his neck knotted; the veins in his forehead swelled. He wished, like Alceste, for the gods of this world to have one neck that he might wring it.

Then infinite weariness succeeded the futile rage. To what end—what end?

He said dully, "It hardly seems worth while to have made us for all this—does it?"

She answered quiveringly, "But it could all be so right!"

"A little too much cannibal in the blood," he muttered.

She did not tell him any more then. She was too tired for words and yet she could not sleep. She clung tightly to his hand as he sat there beside her in the firelight, that died slowly down till shadows and darkness possessed the room.

And then suddenly she began to talk, to tell him of the fight, of her search, of the long hours with her dead. Not one word of her own loss had crossed her lips since the day she came again to the hospital, and never again did she tell to anyone what she told this grim, silent man

beside her in the darkness, but in her weakness the misery of her soul overflowed and poured out to him. Brokenly, haltingly, the grim story came. All the dumb horrors that had pressed upon her strove for utterance.

"Those dead—those dead," she said over again, in her hoarse, tired voice. "They burned them in the nights—they tied them together like cords and stacked them to be carried out. . . . And always some woman. . . . Some woman is waiting. . . ."

He had no words. His heart bled for her.

Once or twice he thought she slept. But when he stirred to throw a new log upon the fire she would be instantly alert, her haggard eyes searching for him through the dusk.

Sometimes she put a fitful question. How was the hospital? That was moved, he told her. A new building near by had been given where there could be space for operations.

"So you're downstairs again?"

"Yes."

"All alone here?"

"All alone."

"How is Peggy? Won't she be missing you——"

"She isn't here."

"You've sent her away?"

He nodded.

"Then you're quite alone," she muttered, and added, "Were you afraid?"

"Yes."

She barely heard him. "They'll never get here now," she whispered. "That—living sacrifice—has saved

France." And then she began to whisper again about that sacrifice, telling him incessantly of those pitiful things that seared her brain and heart.

It was a strange night. Alone in that empty house those two sat clinging to each other like two shipwrecked souls upon some raft. At last he was sure that she slept, and when an hour went by and she did not stir nor wake he tiptoed quietly away and left her.

It was noon when she awaked, to the clear brightness of her empty room. She stared about her, aware, with returning consciousness, of some numb, pressing weight, some deadly heaviness. . . . It was a full minute before memory came back, cutting like knives. She knew then what that weight was. . . .

The merciful exhaustion of the night had passed. Sleep in refreshing her body had given her back to the torment of her mind. . . . She lay there and remembered how eight months before she had come to that room, eager, ambitious, gay. . . . Since then she had lived what had been her life. . . .

Soon after her first steps across the floor a knock sounded and she found MacNare at her door with a tray of breakfast.

"You are kind," she said gratefully, lifting those great eyes of hers from which all the brightness had been washed by those deep tears. His face shocked her. It was not only that he was thin and white—so white that the black of his eyes and hair was startling in its contrast, but some terrible change had passed over his face leaving it old and drawn and gaunt. It was like the

skeleton faces of suffering that had looked up at her from so many fever beds.

"You are ill," she said abruptly.

He shook his head and left her, telling her to rest.

All that day she stayed in her room. There were letters from her family on the dusty floor where they had been thrust under the door, but she did not read them at once. From Les Buissons she had sent them one or two brief notes saying that she was helping with the nursing there and saying no more; now she sat down at her table and commenced to write, struggling for the pitiful comfort of telling them. . . . Then she leaned back, her face tense. . . . She opened their letters and began to read.

It was too soon for them to answer her notes from Les Buissons; they were still concerned with her presence in Paris and troubled for her safety. The papers were full of an air raid. They wanted her to come home for Thanksgiving, and discussed routes with anxiety, for fear of mines. Italy, they thought, was safest. Everyone was deeply stirred over the war. Everyone was sick at heart for Belgium.

So the letters ran, in artless comments and honest indignation and sympathies, with little details of the home, the commencement of the professor's fall work, the accounts of new students, a new cook, a new dress. And the boys were growing so and missed her dreadfully. If she was helping they would not take her away, but she must not go into danger and she must come home soon.

Katherine sat there a long time, her letters in her

hand. She could see her home, see her mother standing waiting in the door for her as when, a careless, happy girl, she used to come across the campus with flying feet. Some maples would still be flaming. The leaves would be all heaped and scuffly in the paths. . . . She thought of the sodden leaves in that wood where she had left Jeffrey. . . . And then she thought of the brightness in those home faces.

The letter begun to them was torn into small bits. No, she could not write them now, she could not fling into their unsuspecting lives the bitterness of her grief. When she was with them again, when they could help her. . . . But now, to fret her mother, to worry her father's serene and gentle heart—no, she would not do that.

The weakness of the night had passed. There had grown in the girl a new strength, a very gallant courage. She comprehended pain. She could not bear to deal it. And since her family did not know of her love for Jeffrey, since he was only a name to them, someone she had met on the boat and seen later in Paris, her letter would be a needless bolt out of the blue.

So she postponed that writing. Later—when she had seen Jeffrey's mother.

From Les Buissons she had sent a note to Mrs. Edgerton telling her of Jeffrey's death. Now she wrote again, saying that she was coming to London and would meet her to tell her all the story. She knew how that poor mother must be yearning to hear. She thought of Jeffrey's words, "Go to mother. Tell her—everything," with a deep longing for the fulfillment of that telling.

She would tell her everything. Their sorrow was one sorrow. And they could talk together of Jeffrey—she could go with her to that home Jeffrey had pictured and in the sheltering peace of those old gardens and quiet walks she could live for a while in the scenes that he had loved and in the memories of the happiness that he had once given her.

She longed for the solace of his mother and his mother's love as a spent runner longs for his goal. If she could once be there, she thought, be with those who knew and loved Jeffrey where she could hear of him and dream of him—then something of peace might come.

After posting the letter she crossed limping to the crémerie, for her evening meal, and saw that the little woman there wore black. She recalled the young husband who was gone, a plump, obliging man with a quick smile and a vast pride in his young bride and his clean place, and his own special tarts *à cerises*. How strange a mark for tragedy!

She said something of gentle sympathy to the young widow. The woman made a vaguely deprecating gesture, apathetic almost in the inclusiveness.

"There are so many of us," she said.

She asked after Madame Bonnet, reporting that little Jeanne and Thomas, left in a neighbor's care, were well.

Katherine thought that Madame Bonnet would return shortly with Marie and her baby girl.

"It is well that they were not here," said the little woman. "Otherwise they would have been up there——"

"Up where?"

The woman betrayed a faint surprise at the blankness of Katherine's look. "But in those upper rooms! . . . Is it possible you have not heard?"

"I but came last night. What is the matter?"

"And you have not looked? . . . Nor seen the poor monsieur?"

"Yes, I have seen him. But he has not said——"

"Regard, if you please."

Katherine turned and followed the other's gesture. And then she saw what she had not yet lifted her eyes to observe, that the upper story of the studio building had suffered some collapse, and was now patched with new repairs and replacements.

"And mademoiselle has not heard!" the woman repeated with a ghost of her old vivacity. Then she sighed. "The poor little one!"

A ghastly premonition began to stir. "Not—not Peggy—Marguerite? What happened? The——"

"The Zeppelins? What else? They came at night—that night of the eleventh, and bomb after bomb—it was terrible! And one of the first went through that roof. The monsieur was upon one side of the room—the child in her cot on the other. . . . He was hurled against the wall, that was all. . . . But she——!"

The young woman shuddered. "They say that it was beyond anything. The father had to look for her, mademoiselle, to pick her up bit by bit. . . . I must not think of it. . . . He buried her that Sunday. And now he lives down there again—for they moved the hospital the next day into a more commodious place that

was given—and he lives like some wild animal in his den, coming and going, getting his food, shutting himself up in the daytime and stirring out at night through the dark streets. . . . My heart aches for him."

Katherine did not answer. She crossed that street on flying feet; with shaking hands she knocked upon the door of the studio and when no answer came she knocked again sharply, calling out.

She heard bars withdrawn and pushing open the door she found herself face to face with Robert MacNare. In that first look she saw that he knew that she had heard, and then he half turned away as if dreading her words. Her hands went out and clutched at his arm. "Oh, you—you too!"—she faltered and then all words failed. Her voice lodged in her throat. Dry, gasping sobs shook her. She leaned her head against the hands that were clutching his arm and clung there shaking convulsively.

A shudder ran through the man; he stiffened against her, staring away. And then very tragically all the stark fighting strength wilted from him; his big shoulders sagged and he bowed above her, his breath coming in great tearing gasps.

It frightened her from her own abandon. "Oh, what a weak fool I am to come to you like this! But Oh, my dear, my dear——"

Her hands relaxed and he turned from her shakingly and stumbled into a chair where he sat huddled, fighting for that grim control which the girl's passionate pity had overthrown. His brain was foaming again with blood and horror as on that night of death. But in a

moment, it seemed, he drew himself up and turned to her the bleak, set face of a man who faces something quite unalterable.

"You see, I go a little mad at times," he said huskily. "But you—you must not take it like that——"

He came to her as if he would put his hand on her shaking shoulder, then he turned aside and began hunting on a table for a pipe. "There is nothing to be said."

"Have you had dinner?" she unexpectedly demanded.

He looked about vaguely. "I? . . . Have you?"

"No," she denied promptly. "Will you come with me?"

"Can you go—on that knee? I'll bring you something."

"No, we'll go. My knee is quite right. We'll go somewhere where there is a little light and very few people. Please, dear Surly Man."

As she waited till he found his hat and coat she noticed a revolver lying casually among the pipes and books upon his dusty table. She wondered, very pitifully, why he had happened not to blow out his brains. She thought that his despair was the kind to cut its way out . . . in some black moment. . . . She did not know that two things only had lowered that loaded gun from the throbbing temple that so ached for surcease of its memories. And one thing was that he was waiting for news of her safety. And the other thing was that he preferred for that revolver muzzle some other temple—some temple in a green-gray uniform. Now this second thing was still deferred on her account. For MacNare

forgot himself in a compassion for her that was born out of his old love for her and yet greater than it, for now his sorry heart neither hoped nor despaired, asking only to shelter her a little, to help her over this first difficult place, to spend himself in what service and comfort he could give. . . . He had never loved her in the blossoming of all her bright loveliness as he loved her now, wan and weak and grieving, but his love was infinitely different, infinitely deeper. Her sorrow was a bond to him in his sorrow. He would have given his life, that poor, unhappy, tormenting life of his, given it up in tortures, gladly, if he could have brought back to her that brave young boy whom he remembered as a triumphant god of youth. . . . And still he thought of him as one of life's lucky ones. For into his soldier's grave he had taken her love with him . . . he had known it to the last.

That night she told him that she was going to London, as soon as her knee was well, to Jeffrey's mother, and he answered that they would go together as he had business to arrange in London, too.

"Mrs. Grundy is too busy for gossip," he added, with the ghost of his sardonic smile. "We can be cousins of a sort; you know you shouldn't travel alone now."

She accepted his escort with a gratefulness that yet fell short of real appreciation. She was engrossed in thoughts of Jeffrey's mother. If she could only reach her, only open her heart to her, then perhaps she would feel less miserably forlorn. . . .

It was a gray crossing and a dim landing. Neither of

the two travelers had much to say to each other, yet she felt his silent presence as a comfort.

In London he found her an old family hotel of the old type, and for himself he took a quiet place around the corner. She had telegraphed to Edgerton Hall, and Mrs. Edgerton replied that she would reach town and call upon her that next afternoon, and all that day she waited with quickening expectancy.

## CHAPTER XXVI

THE drawing-room was long and narrow with two high windows at one end. As Katherine came forward into the room, her heart hurrying with an excitement she had not forgotten she could feel, a tall, slender figure in deep mourning rose from one of the chintz-covered chairs and held out a quick hand.

"Miss King?"

There was a trace of Jeffrey in the swift motion and the turn of the head, but only a trace. The mother's features were softer and not so clear cut, and the blue of her eyes was paler and blurred now as if by secret tears. It was a delicate but not a weak face; she was stricken but there was something proud and fine in her grief, shining out with that indomitable look of race that Jeffrey had worn.

"You are the nurse who was with my son?"

Katherine knew then that Jeffrey had left his mother uninformed, as she, herself, had bidden, and that, as yet, she was but a stranger to her, a messenger from him. At the instant she became aware of another figure which had risen behind the mother, that of a young girl also

in deep black, a sweet-looking little creature with wistful violet eyes and a weakly pretty mouth.

"I was acting as nurse—then and afterwards. I am not a real member of the corps," Katherine answered slowly. She wished that the girl were not there; she had not thought of Mrs. Edgerton's bringing anyone with her. Yet it was very natural. The girl smiled rather shyly upon her and Mrs. Edgerton, as if remembering her, murmured that she had brought Miss Harcombe, a close friend, with her.

"Please tell us—everything," she said as they sat down.

She had the air of one who steels herself to endure—and to conceal a grief too sacred for the public eyes. "How was he hurt?" she asked, as Katherine hesitated.

It had become hard for Katherine to speak. She was conscious of that girl before her, leaning forward with upraised eyes.

"I wrote you what day it was," she began. "I was at the hospital at Les Buissons, where I had taken the place of a nurse who died. . . . The day before the Germans had captured the village, but the Allies made a night attack and retook it, driving the Germans as far back as they could. There was a terrible battle from midnight all through the next day. . . . In the afternoon we went out on the field to find the wounded."

"And he—was there?" the mother prompted.

"Yes—he was there." Katherine looked past her, seeing again that desolate plain beneath the lowering sky. . . . She saw Jeffrey lying there bleeding. . . . "He was far away," she said in a very low voice, "and

I was all alone when I got to him, and it was dusk. And for him it was—too late—to do anything. . . . He had been stabbed in the chest."

Very slowly she went on, choosing her words with difficulty, speaking of his wound, of his lack of suffering at the last, of his high courage. . . .

A silence fell. The mother was breathing heavily, with tight-shut lips, in her face that look of anguished but exalted suffering that a martyr might wear. Her eyes were remote. Perhaps she saw again the panorama of her boy's life, his babyhood, his merry youth, his pride in his first uniform.

Then her glance came back to the American girl with startled remembrance. "It was very good of you, Miss King, to have stayed with him. . . . Did he talk much? What did he say? There must have been—last messages."

"He was very weak," said Katherine. "He said—very little."

"But that little?" The older woman spoke with unconscious authoritativeness as though this unknown girl before her were holding back a priceless possession. "There must have been messages to me—and to Miss Harcombe," she added, turning to the young creature with her who was wiping away the flowing tears. "He would speak of her as Violet. If my son had lived—" Her voice quivered and she exchanged with the weeping girl a look of tender and sad understanding.

Katherine sat very still, her head bent, her tense fingers clasped in the folds of her black gown. No use to protest to herself that she did not know what she

could do—she knew to dreariness! She could have laughed aloud for the ironic misery of it. . . . Her dreams of casting herself into this mother's arms—of taking a daughter's place in her life! Her dreams of memories in the shelter of Jeffrey's gardens!

She could not tell her story. She could not strip from that slight, weakly trusting little thing the pitiful solace of her poor little romance-of-what-might-have-been; she could not rob her of the dignity of her real sorrow. . . . It did not matter that the girl had built falsely. It did not matter. Perhaps she truly believed—had been led to believe——

Something seemed to be happening to herself—she could not stop to discover what it was. They were asking her things and she had to be very, very careful or she would hurt them. . . . What was that was asked? Oh, yes, his last messages.

Slowly, trying to gain time, "He spoke of his wound, saying that it was no use, that he knew he must go. He said it was too late to pretend. He said, 'It's nearly on the clock for me,' and—and just after that he said, 'We must win.' He told me to go to you—to tell you everything." Heavily the words fell from her lips. She did not raise her eyes. "He sent you his love—and good-by."

"And—and—did he say—" The girl was leaning forward, her wistful eyes drowned in tears, her lips quivering.

Katherine closed her eyes a moment. She was thinking of that kiss, that last kiss. The supreme agony of

those dying moments threatened to rise above her like a sea. She longed to spring up and cry out to them, "No, no—he was mine, mine, mine! Once I saved him, and at the last I came to him. He died loving me—and I shall live in that love forever."

But she knew that she was strong enough to find, even for this girl, the kind lie that would comfort.

"It might have been, 'Vi'," she half whispered, "and then—good-by!"

She felt shamed when she had said it, as if she had stained the purity of the truth of that dying hour. She was not repaid by the light that came into the girl's face. Her own light seemed extinguished forever. . . . And down the way that she had come in those moments there was no returning.

"And his—last words?" said the mother.

"He said—good-by."

In the long silence they thought their different thoughts of the dead. Then the mother spoke. It seemed as if no voice could withstand the strain she put upon it, but hers was unwavering, only a little hesitant. "And—the body? Is there any way that we could get —later—perhaps?"

"He is buried in a wood. Alone. . . . If the trees stand I could find the place again."

"Surely—if he had been carried to camp—I would have paid anything——"

"They could not have carried him back to camp. They were digging trenches and putting them all together—pouring in quicklime." Katherine gave the naked facts dully. Her auditors flinched.

Something else recurred to her. "I have some keepsakes for you. I will bring them."

She had left them in her room, having meant to bring the mother to that seclusion before giving her the relics of her boy, but now she rose and went for them, leaving the slender, straight figure tensely upright in the incongruously gay chintz chair, with that other drooping little figure beside it, crying softly.

In her room she unlocked her treasure box and took out the ring and the wrist-watch and the pocketbook and the writing things and carried them downstairs and put them silently into the other woman's hands. She saw the mother's chin quiver as she looked down on those poor relics of her boy that was gone, and when Mrs. Edgerton raised her eyes Katherine felt in their remoteness that utter withdrawal of the human spirit into its incommunicable grief.

Miss Harcombe began to sob aloud. "Violet, dear, you must not. Remember what we have to be proud of." Mrs. Edgerton spoke with quiet, restraint, still looking down upon her relics. "Some of these—but later." She put the things away carefully in a black bag she carried and turned to Katherine. "His sword? Did anyone think of that?"

"It was buried with him."

"They sent me his father's from South America." It was not reproach but wistfulness that spoke. . . . So twice to this slender, delicate woman had come those poor relics out of the silence—once for her husband and once for her son.

"Oh, I wish I had known—had thought!"

The sad pity of the cry brought Mrs. Edgerton's eyes to Katherine, and from out her remoteness her attention concentrated a moment on this girl before her who had been the comforter of her dying son. How young she was and how pretty . . . but such pale, thin cheeks, and such dark shadows, like bruises, about her big, sorrowful eyes. . . . She must have been seeing terrible things . . . going about a battlefield seeking the wounded. . . . Fleetingly she wondered about her.

"You are an American?" she questioned.

"Yes." The girl's lips closed sharply over further speech that might be too revealing. Perhaps Mrs. Edgerton knew of Jeffrey's going to Paris to see some American. . . . She was looking very attentively at her now, as if remembering something. . . . But if the mother's mind raised any questions she did not seek an answer. And Katherine's silence seemed to exorcise them.

"You have been more than kind," she said. "You have taken a great deal of trouble for me. It was more than I could expect and I am grateful. I would like—" She hesitated. "Is there anything in the world that I can do for you, my dear?"

Dumbly Katherine shook her head. There was a lump in her throat that would not be swallowed. She knew then that she could have loved this woman. . . .

"You must leave me your address. And later, after it is over—if you can remember the place . . . I would like to have him in the old church."

"Yes, I will send my address. And I will write you

everything I can remember of the place so that if anything should happen to me you could find it."

"I should be grateful."

For a moment more Jeffrey's mother held her hand, looking down upon her, saying something of her sad gratitude, and then she was gone, her arm slipped through that of the clinging girl. They were fond of each other, Katherine could see. . . . She moved to the window. A very old man was holding open the door of a carriage. He closed it upon them and they drove away.

Upstairs she locked the box that looked so empty now. But still she had his letters. . . . And then she remembered, and looking down upon her third finger she saw that she had been wearing before them the old signet which Jeffrey had placed there that Sunday at Les Buissons. . . . Had the mother noticed?

She would never know now, she thought, what interpretation—perhaps to her discredit—the mother would place upon its presence there. It seemed to her the last card in a pack of ironies.

## CHAPTER XXVII

THAT night she had no more terms to make with grief. It had its way with her.

In those first stunned days at the hospital she had been drugged with work. And in Paris when she had waked to the meaning of her loss she had fled from it, like a child running in terror before some overwhelming thing, hurrying blindly to the refuge of Jeffrey's mother and the comfort of her understanding and her sympathy.

Now that refuge was gone. She had closed the door upon it, or rather, it had never been open. Her common-sense now flashed the dry white light of ironic understanding over that. . . . To Jeffrey's mother she would have been a stranger, an outsider, someone who had captured Jeffrey's heart from her. . . . Instinctively she divined that the very mildness of his affection for the little Violet was a recommendation for the girl in the mother's eyes. She was no formidable rival, but a dear protégée to be sheltered.

Now that was all over. . . . She was shut out from everything of his old life. . . . She felt like Hagar stumbling into the wilderness. . . .

And Jeffrey was gone . . . gone forever. . . . She must think what life would be like now; she must look at her life, face it clearly. . . .

Wave after wave of anguish went over her. She lay on her bed, stiff and rigid, her hands tightly clenched, as if she were enduring a physical spasm. If she kept very quiet perhaps this agony would abate . . . like a fever. . . .

But her mind would not be quiet. Like a storm at sea it was casting up its wreckage—memories, pictures, images, old thoughts, old associations. . . . She kept seeing Jeffrey's face, eager and splendid, with that shining look that his eyes held for her, even at the last. . . . She kept hearing his voice in the old words and phrases, but ending always in the pitiable ghost-like whisper, "Is it possible? . . . All that was to be."

All that was to be! Those other women in black, those wives, those mothers, they were not to be pitied as was she; they had lived their love, they had days and nights of memories, of dear associations, of priceless hours. She had so little! Their love and life were all before them. . . . And now it was all over. Never to see him again, never to be his wife, never to hear his dear home-coming step. . . .

She twisted over on the bed, hiding her face in her arms, great sobs shaking her body. She felt she could not bear it. . . . But other people had borne it. They had lived—somehow. Ellen Wharton had lived, frozen into a sad statue, going about the surface of life. . . . Bravely or bitterly, somehow people lived.

And she must live. Her splendid chance! The words

flung themselves at her ironically. Her splendid chance of life and love and happiness all wrecked and broken and trampled underfoot—under a Kaiser's foot.

Never again. . . . Her heart took up the burden of that nevermore and beat against the doors of mystery. . . . Sorrow does away with all the little candles men have lit to see by and demands the great white light of truth. . . . She strained her untried eyes in vain to search its farthest rays.

What was the meaning of life? A great, whirling, nebulous mass, rotating, condensing, cooling . . . with a flicker of animation creeping from plant to plant, leaping the border into animal existence, mounting from form to form, higher and higher, to blaze up into human consciousness—and then?

The mystery of the human consciousness! Science could not answer her, any more than the kind God of her mother's church, a church where hell was tacitly ignored and heaven assumed, a church where every sparrow's fall was still credited with prearrangement and the answer to every perplexity was that of a "mysterious way His wonders to perform."

What answer was that to Belgium? What answer to the unending history of human injustice and brutality and martyrdom? What heaven was that of shining saints, faith-saved, their brothers damned?

It would take a greater God than the God of separate churches to answer her—and still He did not speak. Unless this world was His mouthpiece? And if it was——

Her spirit was standing at the gates of death, shaking

the bars. What was beyond? The resurrection? The transference of the spirit? . . . Either were a death to the old and loved familiar flesh. . . . A sleep? A sleep unending, like the flowers whose seeds may spring to fresh life but whose petals are gathered into the bosom of the earth in undying but unidentical persistence? Was this analogy for both the flesh and spirit?

So everyone who thinks and feels and loves questions of life. And so Katherine, in the travail of her soul. But no one who had gone through the anguish of that battlefield and its scenes of suffering could find a simple answer to that chaos of human fury and human exaltation.

From its desperate questionings her heart dropped back into its own grief of loss. What did it matter? What did it all matter? Jeffrey was gone—and she must live without him.

"But I can't—I can't," she moaned.

The next morning she telephoned MacNare and he came to her hotel, prepared for the parting which had been understood between them.

"But I'm not going," she said quickly, to his inquiring look. "Not—not to Edgerton Hall."

He was shocked by the alteration of the night. She had a feverish color and her eyes were bright and defiantly hard as if she were warning off the world.

"I—I didn't tell her," she went on rapidly, as he waited for her speech. "She—she had a girl with her—someone she was fond of and someone who was fond of Jeffrey and who thought. . . . You see, I couldn't tell

them. It wouldn't have done me any good," she added, trying for light indifference, "for they wouldn't have loved me for it. . . . This was a wild goose chase, you see. . . . Except of course that—that I would have come anyway and told her—everything I could—of his death. . . . And now it's all over——"

"Yes? Now?"

Her eyes looked past him. Her locked fingers twisted restlessly.

"You'll go home? To your mother?"

"My mother? And bring this to her?" She touched her own breast. "How can I? I've never told her of Jeffrey, you see. . . . And now— No, I'm no use there. I can be of use in Paris. So I'll go back. If—if you could tell me about trains——"

He thought that it was a hard fate which had sent this girl to Europe on the same boat with Jeffrey Edgerton. Just another day before sailing——

Aloud he said, "You need a rest, a change——"

"Don't you know that a rest is the last thing in the world that I need?" she flashed petulantly at him. "I want to get away, to get away from everybody, from myself! I want to work, to forget——"

"You won't do much work till you've had a rest," he continued stolidly. "No doctor would put you on a case now. He'd put you to bed. . . . I want you to come down to the Cotswolds with me."

"The Cotswolds?"

"I'm sufficiently a cousinly person for you to be with, and I don't believe we'd find any society to inquire."

"It isn't *that!*. But I don't want——"

"I've business there and I—I'd like you to go with me. I—want someone with me, you know."

"Business!" she mocked. He met her look with a steadiness that melted her eyes to gentleness. Not that she believed a word he said. He was trying to make out a case for himself, in order to give her the change he thought she needed. It was touchingly friendly.

"It's so quiet there," he told her, "and so open. You'd like it for a few days."

And of course, whether he knew it or not, he really did need someone with him. She had not forgotten his grim isolation in his own terrible loss. But he seemed so strong, so able now to endure, that she faintly wondered. What formula had he found for going on with life?

She had no thought at all that the queer, black-browed young man who sat so stolidly before her in that chintz-hung drawing-room, knew now but one formula as a spring for action. As long as she was near him, as long as she needed him in her peculiar loneliness and he could care for her and help her a little, why then he had something to do from moment to moment. He had a dumb, hungry longing to be with her. He accepted the utter hopelessness and the limitations of this strange association, and he asked nothing for himself but to help her now a little and then stand aside. He told himself that he would not suffer long.

With utter indifference she left the details to him. It did not matter to her where she went or what she did.

She wanted to be left alone and allowed to eat her heart out in bitter rebellion at the havoc of her life.

She was preoccupied with her own misery and did not appreciate the patient kindliness of the taciturn man beside her, and his thoughtfulness for her in little things, but she remembered his trouble and tried to rouse herself and make an effort for his sake. It was a strange journey. She knew that he was taking it for her sake, trying to be kind to her, and though her heart made no response her courage tried to hide her wretchedness and accept his friendliness as he meant it.

So when the train had climbed to the little hidden village among the barren hills whither MacNare's recollections pointed him, she feigned pleasure in the place, the scenery, the quaint lodgings which he found for her around the corner from his tiny inn, and all the excursions that he constantly devised, going docilely with him for walks and drives or long rambles along the scantily wooded streams in some wide valley, or breathless climbs up the hilly slopes that looked so slack and proved so endless.

But for her it was just the country that she would never see with Jeffrey, the England where she and Jeffrey would never live. . . .

Every day her bitter heart said that it could not go on.

It was the seventh week since Jeffrey had died. It seemed to her that it was the seventh year. Already she had grown accustomed to pain, to waking with a heart of lead into a world in which she was alone. The first wild resentment, the anguished incredulity with which

her heart had wakened to her loss and cried, "It cannot, cannot be true! That voice cannot be stilled forever, that warm ardent heart cannot be cold—these things are too awful to be!" and refused to accept the present in the vision of the past, this defiance had been beaten by every slow, succeeding day into submission.

She accepted the fact of her loss and as the days went by felt as if she had always known it. The young country couples, glad in each other's nearness, waked no longer a rebellious cry against blind fate but only a dumb wonder that asked heavily if her heart had ever been as joyous, her laugh as ready. . . . So quickly does grief exhaust its wonder, and know itself for a maimed thing.

She went through only the motions of living in those empty days. There was a certain amount of pretense about it, a certain semblance of interest to screen her from the village eyes, but behind this screen of motion the real woman sat idly, with folded hands. She felt that her inner life was done.

She thought one night that she wished never to wake again. And she waked early, in the chill of before-dawn, with a glimpse of the reddening east in the November sky. She dressed hurriedly and left the quiet house, passing the inn where a solitary hostler, washing down a horse in the court, touched his cap to her in surprise.

Down the lane she went and into one of the winding roads that curved among the hills, and presently she

turned off from the road and started up a grassy hillside. An intense need for out-of-doors, for breathing space, drove her on. She wanted to exhaust herself in physical energy. She climbed blindly at first with no eyes for the country; it seemed to her that beauty would never mean anything to her again.

The air was mild though with the tang of crisper days at hand, and there was still green in the stubbly grass under her feet. She looked down at the gauzy, dew-filled cobwebs stretching from blade to blade. Ahead of her there were white rabbits scampering away. One turned and looked back at her with soft, inquiring eyes. It looked very innocent and friendly. And men shot them for sport! Everything in the world held its stab of pain.

And everything held its associations. There had been a little white rabbit breakfasting about the farm that day of the first battle.

She went on and on, hurrying with a sense of urgency, almost of expectation. There were no trees and the sky stretched overhead in limitless space. Her back was to the east but she saw ahead of her its faint reflections. The blue of the sky was deepening above with the deepening light. She passed a dew-pond, full, unstirred, a circle of sky invaded by the rosy flush of east. . . . Her heart beat suddenly with a fuller pulse. She pressed on, tirelessly.

And then she reached the top, a great, bare headland of jutting rock and close-cropped grass, and turned to look down. It was not a high hill but it seemed high in the morning light, and the soft vapors of the night still

veiled the valleys so that the world seemed to lie at her feet.

In the east a flash of fire leaped from behind a craggy hill head and ran along the rim of the dim world. Up from the horizon into the reddened clouds there poured a blaze of gold, like the flames of Wotan's forge or Brünhilde's dancing fire, and into the burning beauty sprang out the red-gold sun. A shaft of purest light seemed to flash along the hilltops; she felt bathed in its light and in a sense of fresh, new day. . . . A wind sprang up; it blew cool against her forehead, tossing back her hair. Down in the valleys it was blowing back the vapors, revealing gleaming little lakes. The dew-pond's reflected gold was crisped with sudden, tiny waves. The cobwebs glowed.

Again she felt the stir that all strong manifestations of nature roused in her, the sense of being one with them and sharing them. She felt caught up in that free wind and carried out to high heaven and the fiery east; the light and the pure color dazzled her and her blood flowed faster in her veins, her breath came and went in sudden ecstasy. . . . God—nature—something inarticulate out there was answered by the articulate spirit within. . . . Splendor and beauty lived and called to her.

Suddenly she felt herself strong and enduring, even as the earth was enduring, and in the elemental clay her spirit burned with a new fire. . . . She felt glad. Life was not all horror while it held love and beauty, and love was not gone while memory lived. The mystery of it was still insoluble, but she was unafraid.

God was greater than any creed that men could bind Him with. He was no demon omniscience, designing her heart to its individual anguish. He was no gross mismanager of monarchies, accessible to prayer and incense and the formal beseechments of crowned heads. . . . He was that light that sprang at her from the dawn, that ray that kindled in men's hearts. . . .

Strange how that flash of consciousness that had been running through the world, from form to form, from life to life, seemed still winging on its ways among men, kindling, ennobling, enlightening! And however the majority of men were dull to its spark, unaware of high capacity, content to cower, to accept, to make terms, to serve, there were always found the shining spirits, knowing a higher life, realizing a sublimer self. These were the Fire-bringers among men, that like Prometheus would give their bodies to the torment rather than betray the mission of their souls. Were these the last answer of conscious life, the final sublimity of evolution?

For a moment her thoughts followed on this trail of her old questionings, then they came back to confront that world which stretched about her, into which she must descend and live her days. . . . She thought of the future now steadily. Her heart was not empty! It held priceless memories of love and courage. Bitter that Jeffrey must be one of the martyrs in that struggle of the everlasting verities of freedom and right against undying stupidities and cruelties, but splendid for her that he had lived, that she had known him, that they had loved!

She looked out over the world, fresh and beautiful, and though the irrecoverable beauty and freshness of her own life were gone, her splendid chance for perfect joy, she felt the indestructible forces of youth and life within her. And she knew that she would go on, and go on bravely and stanchly, not darkening a sad world with her grief, but drawing strength from her memories, from her own soul, and from the strength of this nature, so impersonal, so enduring, so free of beauty.

She knew herself then as a woman stronger than the grief-crushed girl, able to hide her wounds and to help, perhaps, in healing others. That was all that really mattered now—to heal, to comfort, to help bandage those many wounds. . . . She thought, as of a stranger, of that other self who had set sail, those nine months before, to find her fortune, that other, so avid of happiness, so incredulous of disaster!

## CHAPTER XXVIII

"TO France!" she told MacNare, turning to him with a sudden smile.

He had just asked her where they should go that afternoon.

All morning they had driven on an old Roman road by high and windy pastures where low-massed clouds trailed their slow and purple shadows on the empty fields, and all morning her thoughts had fed silently on new purposes while her senses had quickened to the beauty about her.

She added, "My 'rest' has lasted long enough."

MacNare saw that the girl Katherine was gone. It was a woman, steady-eyed and quiet-lipped, that smiled at him, and his heart ached for that gay lost creature with her eyes of joy. . . . If only he could see her face light again in the old way, see her lips pucker in their saucy young laughter! . . . But the world was replete with the destruction of precious things and this girl's lightness of heart had gone with the rest.

It was one thing more out of his life, that was all—and the last. . . . The first flush of his youth had been squandered on a waster. . . . Then he had shut him-

self away from love, and a child had taken the place in his life of all that affection might mean to other men. . . . But love was not a matter of decision. It had taken him by surprise, invaded him like a rush of spring. He had had his brief dream—a dream of folly. His heart still knew the pang of that moment when he had glimpsed Katherine on the brow of the hill, her arm in Jeffrey's.

So had gone love, with the dumb show of friendship remaining. Then had gone the child, torn out of his life in a bloody nightmare of horror. . . . Now the last use of friendship was nearly over.

"And in France?" he heard himself asking.

"Work again. Nursing. Yes, and I want to paint again, strong things, terrible things, even, that people may see and know. . . . That may be my way of helping."

After a silence she added, "And you?"

"I have some work, too," he said slowly. "One last thing to do—also that people may see and understand. . . . That will occupy me for some little time."

Madame Bonnet was back in the building with Marie and her baby and the two children. Jean was a prisoner, and Marie was alternately depressed and thankful that he was not in the trenches. Henri was yet safe. That was the news.

Whatever astonishment the good madame experienced at beholding her two lodgers return together she did not express. MacNare she comprehended and regarded with dumb head-shakings and pitying eyes;

Katherine she studied wonderingly in the days which followed.

"She is a brave girl," she ventured to observe to MacNare, one morning, presenting herself upon some excuse in the studio where he was now eternally engrossed in a huge lump of clay. "Look, now, what she is doing—every other day to the hospitals to relieve the regular nurses, cleaning, bathing, bandaging—such work as no young girl should have to do!—and between times at her easel, or trudging from hospital to refugees to find the picture that she must paint— Oh, she is a brave, a noble girl, monsieur!"

"She is helping herself in helping others," said MacNare shortly.

"It is not for that that she does it!"

"You mistake me. . . . I comprehend her motives. . . . It is their very disinterestedness that is helping her."

Madame was silent, dusting the ashes from a chair as an excuse for lingering. She gave MacNare a stealthily appraising look.

"It is to your grave that you are hurling yourself," she thought with sorrowful indignation. In the crevices of the chair she found a tiny, forgotten paper doll. Hurriedly she tucked it away in her pocket. She had found that he had shut out of sight every little frock and toy of his dead child and she had been swift to aid in removing the little reminders that were such stabs of memory.

After a moment she murmured casually, straighten-

ing from the chair, "But she is blessedly young, monsieur. . . . Youth is a willow wand."

"She is young," said MacNare steadily. "And some day she will—not forget, madame, but overlay the memory with other days and other experiences. . . . So we cannot lose hope for her."

Madame regarded his unstirred countenance with mutinous indignation. Then heavily she sighed. MacNare had changed. Decidedly he was cherishing no more personal hope. . . . He applied himself to his clay as if, thought madame, nothing in the world could be made but from mud.

And yet Katherine would nearly always stop at his door on her way back from the hospitals, and often they went out to dinner together. . . .

It was to Katherine that the good woman offered her next remarks. Entering the kitchen in her own quarters one noon some few days later she chanced to find her young lodger there, talking with Marie and the baby, and she promptly sent Marie on an errand and addressed herself to some understanding of this strange American.

"Marie needs the air," she remarked to her. "You will not mind holding the baby, mademoiselle, while I complete this soup? . . . It is for the monsieur. If I did not bring him a hot dish he would forget to eat, that poor man."

Katherine was cuddling the tiny girl. There being an American rocking-chair in the kitchen she rocked blissfully, the little body warm against her, the fuzzy head on her arm. It gave her a tender feeling to hold

the baby and yet it hurt—cruelly. For there would be no little children of her own to hold, no little sons with Jeffrey's eyes, no little daughters. . . . She bowed her head over the baby, swinging slowly to and fro.

"Mademoiselle, that man should not be so much alone," said madame thoughtfully, nodding her head to indicate the sculptor in the front of the house. "I do what I can—but it is not much. And you, of course, are busy. . . . I am troubled for him."

"I know," Katherine sighed. "But he is working hard, and isn't that the best thing for him?"

"Do you imagine that he forgets? . . . I do not know what he is making in there but sometimes his face is the face of ten devils. . . . Remember that she was all he had—and they blew her head off her body!"

Madame added, her voice breaking, "You do not know how even I miss her! The little innocent. . . . I had her so much. . . . It was I who bought her little things. . . ."

They were silent, with thoughts of the child heavy between them. Katherine found herself remembering one night when Peggy had cuddled down upon her couch putting her paper dolls to bed . . . such a big-eyed, curly-haired little mite, all fat legs and dimples . . . and MacNare had sat there smoking . . . and had told her of the mother.

She had been sorry for him then, God knows. . . . And she had been glad to think that the child would be more and more a comfort to him. . . .

She strained the baby to her suddenly. . . . How one's very life could twine about a child!

"He must not be so alone," madame was repeating insistently.

"I don't mean to leave him alone," Katherine returned. "I want to do everything I can—he was so good to me in England, you don't know how good! . . . But I don't think he cares for much companionship now. I felt I mustn't intrude upon him."

"For you that would be an impossibility."

Katherine looked doubtful. "I presume much now upon our friendship——"

"It is more than as a friend that he regards you, my child."

Over the baby's head Katherine raised warning eyes to her. "You must not say such things, dear madame."

"Not say them? Is a true devotion then only accepted—but never acknowledged?"

A faint color found its way into the girl's cheeks. "You must not mistake the great kindness of Monsieur MacNare."

"Kind he is, with a heart of gold—but it is not I who misunderstand," said madame calmly. "Monsieur worships the very ground upon which you walk. . . . You brought spring when you came to this house—and I saw that Monsieur MacNare remembered that he was young and I was glad for him. For I thought that when mademoiselle knew him—and she was so friendly with him that I dreamed. . . . And then, fool that I was! I sent him to Les Buissons."

"You sent him?"

"I told him that you were there, that you did not regard him as a grandfather with a wooden leg! He

was young and a man of genius. He had means. Why not? I did not know then that mademoiselle had met her man. . . . And monsieur went off like a boy to make a little holiday with you, perhaps to let you look into his heart. . . ."

She paused, apparently concentrating upon the soup, and Katherine's thoughts went back that long way to the Sunday at Les Buissons, to MacNare, and his queer look when she had come down the hill with Jeffrey, to his abrupt departure. She could see him still, marching down the farm path, little Peggy clinging to his hand. . . . A hundred half-forgotten, half-glimpsed impressions rushed back to her. . . . But he had been so stolidly reserved, so shy of speech in all his bluntness!

Eyeing her changing face, "Saint Anne of Miracles, but she did not know!" thought madame amazedly. "He has never let her see—not even in England. . . . He is mad, that young man! And she—did not her poor young Englishman—God rest his soul!—teach her what stuff men's hearts are made of?"

"I am so sorry," said a sober little voice over the baby's head. "I would not have hurt him for anything."

"It was not you, mademoiselle, it was the destiny."

Katherine's perceptions, at last aroused, were running on swiftly. If this were true—why this, then, was the secret of his gentleness to her, his patient tenderness in her grief. . . . She remembered the night of her desolate return to the studio. . . . She remembered the gray crossing to England. . . . She remembered the long days at the Cotswolds. . . .

"Mademoiselle must not regret that I have mentioned this," said the older woman, a little anxiously. "I but spoke of it to show that it would be impossible for you to presume, as you said, upon his feeling for you. There is nothing that you can do that would be displeasing to him. And now that he is alone and fairly ill with grief you can do much for him."

"I will do everything I can," said the girl, with a simple readiness that managed to depress poor madame's hopes. "If my companionship can help I am only too glad to give it. He is my dear friend. . . . And whatever he thought in the beginning, madame, and that Sunday at Les Buissons, that is now long past."

She looked up at the Frenchwoman with a faint, wistful smile. "We are two different creatures, now, he and I, and it is our sorrow that is a bond between us. . . . I think that no two people could be so empty of desire."

That was the pity of it, thought madame, incurable builder that she was.

There was nothing now to be said. Her two dear mad Americans had their own arrangement of affairs.

But the conversation had touched Katherine's heart to a deepened understanding of that strange friend of hers. She thought it pitiful that after his first tragedy and his odd, hermit years, he should have found fresh hope again only to be disappointed. . . . But it was all very far away now. And the Katherine that he had desired was left back there in the woods at Les Buissons. . . . For this sadder Katherine who had taken her place he had infinite compassion and friendliness—but,

of course, no desire. . . . And grief for a murdered child does not leave a man's heart space for the love of women.

So the girl thought, quite innocently pigeon-holing MacNare's sorry romance among the things that were, and permitting it only a tender memory in her thoughts. But for compunction at her past blindness and the pain that she had unconsciously caused him to suffer in the days of her own happiness she redoubled the frank friendliness of her ways to him, and in the long evening hours that art could not fill for him, and the emptiness of the dinner-time, she tried to make him forget that little figure that had trotted so quietly about the studio, the little face, with its great dark eyes that had watched him across so many dinner-tables.

She felt that it was good that he was working hard at that new model of his. She herself had begun to understand now something of the uses of her creative power. She was filling canvas after canvas with those wan faces at the hospitals, with the dazed horrors of the Belgian refugees, the piteous faces of wives whose husbands had been bayoneted before them, of mothers whose daughters had been torn from them, whose sons had been shot. . . . If only her power of painting could keep some sort of pace with her passionate sorrow for these people—if only she could do them the poor service of winning one jot of the world's compassion!

Often she brought these canvases for MacNare to see. He eyed them with a grim satisfaction.

"Good—you paint like a man."

Guerin had told her that once before.

"What do you mean?"

MacNare thought a minute. "You face facts—not tint them."

"You mean I'm literal?"

"You are fundamentally honest," he brought out slowly, his frowning gaze still on her study. "And unafraid. . . . Women are born colorists. . . . But they shrink from the bare bones of things."

"And you do not?"

She meant it generally. But he took it to himself with a harsh laugh.

"I? I live among the bare bones of things!"

## CHAPTER XXIX

IN one of the workshops that charity was maintaining for needy women Katherine discovered Olga Goulebeff. The little Russian was stitching busily, not for charity, but for the franc and a half a day. The allowance from Russia had ceased.

"Perhaps he is dead, that uncle who saw to it," Olga said. "Anyway it is not here—and I regret for I could do much with it. It would have bought many cigarettes for those poor boys and many warm socks."

It was not of herself that Olga was thinking. The girl's odd eyes were lighted with a pale intensity. "If I were a man!" she said.

A little hesitantly Katherine asked for news of Louis Arnaud.

"One letter has come." Olga's fingers flew on with their rapid stitching as she spoke unemotionally. "It is not to me that he writes often, you understand—and if he should die his people would not know of me to send word—nor send word if they knew." Her tone was not bitter; she was stating the facts unresentfully. "I do not even know where he is. I think at Ypres."

For a moment both girls were silent, their thoughts

with that long drawn battle-line, stretched like a taut and quivering bowstring across France. That living line!

"You still remain?" Olga spoke incuriously.

"Yes. I was nursing for some weeks in the country—now I am helping a little here. And painting."

"Always the painting! You have not forgotten your ambition, then? . . . But why should you," Olga added, pointedly. "It is not your country's life that is at stake."

Katherine was silent. Olga went on, "But that makes it even kinder when the Americans come and help. . . . And they are helping! . . . That woman's son," and she nodded across the busy room to where a wounded youth sat chatting with a group of the women—there were wounded soldiers in many of the groups and little children playing about some women's knees—"he told me of the American legion that enlisted. He was next them on the field. And coming back he led one poor American, his eyes quite gone. . . . He was not twenty-two. . . . Think of it! And he gave them for us! . . . And so you are nursing—and painting. Still learning!"

"Still learning," said Katherine with a shadowy smile. "And so much to learn. . . . But I am working hard."

"Always you worked hard," Olga murmured. "But you had reason."

"You must come and see me," Katherine said in parting. "Come in and have dinner with me, whenever you can, Olga."

The girl nodded without speaking. Then as Kath-

erine turned away she caught at her sleeve, plucking her back.

"If you should hear anything—at your hospitals—his was the —th Regiment——"

"I will let you know at once."

Olga's hand fell slowly. "It is not that I cherish any dreams," she said with a touch of her old irony. "In the beginning of course—always I hoped. For that I went to Les Avants with him, hoping to become dearer and dearer. . . . I am not the first to go that road. Though some succeed. . . . But I was a fool. I was jealous. And so I—I thought to pay him back, to show him that others valued—valued," she echoed with indescribable irony. "They valued me for a boast! . . . And that finished me with him, you comprehend. . . . I became the affair of a day."

Picking up a spool, she briskly threaded her needle. She did not raise her eyes to Katherine but went on sewing, her tone unchanging in its quiet bitterness. "I was a fool who cut my own throat. . . . There is something lacking in me, of course, something too reckless, too uncontrolled, too ready. . . . You angered me that day with your pity as if I were a sinner on her knees. . . . But you were kind. You never spoke—never told. . . . I would like to thank you for that much. . . . After this, perhaps I shall go to New York. I must earn my bread and there my talent can serve for something—if only to draw fashion plates! . . . But now this war is everything. It is both my countries. . . . And it may be that I shall see Louis again."

It was Olga's solitary revelation. Though Katherine

afterwards made a point of running in to her, to taking her out to dinner and seeing that she had something substantial to eat, never again was there any talk between them of the past. Always the crisis of the war engrossed them, and Olga, living like a little anchorite upon her franc and a half a day, still managed to wrest from that pittance, so Katherine found, some two sous or more each day, to drop in the box labeled, "Pour Nos Soldats."

For our soldiers—that was Olga's life.

After that in the hospitals Katherine sought for news of Louis but found nothing.

One day as she passed down the white rows a sudden likeness arrested her. Then she saw that it was more than a likeness; it was Etienne de Trézac himself, the ghost of the old handsome Etienne, lying with closed eyes and drawn, white face. As she looked his dark eyes opened upon her and lighted with recognition.

"Is it you?"

She came up to the side of the bed. "Really I, Etienne—Sister Katherine, now—a substitute, you see. . . . But I am glad to see you again—even here," she added gently, "for we shall soon have you well——"

She looked down and saw the bandaged stump of an arm. The right hand was gone. A rush of scalding pity brought the words, "Oh, Etienne—your painting hand!"

Something flickered in the depths of his dark eyes but they did not flinch and the gallant smile on his pale lips did not falter. "For France I can learn to paint with my left!"

The spirit of those days! The spirit of France! She tried to meet his brave smile with one of her own but her lips quivered. He went on, "That poor man at my left here—he has lost both eyes. And he has a wife and four children and a sick mother dependent upon him. . . . He used to repair watches."

His tone added, "Now that is a tragedy if you like! I am nothing!"

On the next bed a bandaged face turned restively toward them. Katherine bent lower. "Speak softly, Etienne—he hears you."

"He comprehends." Etienne spoke clearly. "And he knows that I comprehend. We are brothers in arms. . . . And I shall always look out for you and yours, my brother."

From the next bed a thin arm was thrust uncertainly forth and Etienne reached and clasped it with his left hand, giving it a warm grip before the hands fell apart. It was only one of the many simple pacts of aid those days made between man and man to whom suffering brought brotherhood. Immediately Etienne demanded cheerfully of Katherine, "Have you a banana? I have never seen a spot so bananaless as this hospital! Is it that they cease to exist? Have the submarines sunk every cargo of them?"

"I'll bring some," Katherine gladly promised, and she came often to spend as much time as was possible with him, reading or chatting cheerfully. In all that hospital hers was the only voice she had heard raised in pity. Every word was of courage or admiration.

Even from Etienne's relatives whom she came to meet

in their visits there, frail and aged gentlewomen of an old régime, she did not hear any condolences to the maimed boy. They were proud of him. He could be proud of himself. He had done his duty.

To them she spoke of the Baroness de Saronne, who had died at Les Buissons, and found they knew her well.

All this news and more she brought back with her to MacNare in his hermitage studio, giving him scene after scene of her days. Some wounded German boys were especially pathetic to her. One had been found fainting across a dead Frenchman to whom he had brought water.

"His own knee was shattered—and he is so patient! Not a complaint, ever. He said to the French boy in the cot next him, 'We are not enemies in hospital—no?' And then he said very worriedly, 'And why should we be enemies at all? . . . We want to live, not kill each other. But it is for the Fatherland.' The *Fatherland!* For Prussia!"

For the officers she felt not so much sympathy. The arrogance of their caste was there. Once she beheld one young German lieutenant spit promptly in the face of a soldier from his own regiment who without being addressed had spoken to him, offering to translate for him. It might not be typical—but it was illustrative of a spirit that made her American blood boil.

And again she sat up all one night with a dying prisoner who had the sins of war on his young conscience. He had gone mad with the others in sacking one Belgian village and there had been a young girl who resisted him—and he had bayoneted her. He told Kath-

erine over and over again how sick it had made him when the steel went running through her soft body.

"She was like my sister at home—but that is war, is it not, nurse? And we had orders—we could do as we liked with the girls. That is war. . . . And someone had fired—it was for an example. She was like Frida. . . . But in war a man is not himself—she should not have fought me. And that old man——"

He babbled, staring-eyed, till dawn brought him death.

There were other scenes more cheerful. One day she came to an English private, an irate cockney, bitterly berating the man who had carried him off a battlefield under fire. "Used me like a sack on 'is back, the beggar did—a blooming shield between 'im and the bullets. They plumped two more into me. . . . And they speaks of 'im for a medal. Life-saving! Garn! *'Ose* life, I'd like to know?"

## CHAPTER XXX

CHRISTMAS came with a sober pealing of bells, with music and candles and high masses in the cathedrals where the women prayed, with flowers and fruit for the hospitals and many, many gifts for the trenches, so many of them pathetically undelivered.

To Etienne de Trézac that day was given his first sight of his fresh-healed stump. He was sitting in an invalid chair, wrapped in a huge blanket, steadily regarding his arm, when Katherine came toward him and for a moment the girl was tempted to turn and run.

Often it seemed to her tense nerves that the limit of sensibility's endurance had been reached, but always she forced herself on.

Now Etienne raised his head and greeted her composedly. "Surveying the relic, you observe," he said, holding it grimly out. "A stupid thing, is it not? Some mechanical horror will doubtless be attached that I may hook up a fallen handkerchief."

"Etienne, do not!"

"I do not mean to distress you. I am but hardening myself to the spectacle. Does it affront you?"

"Never that—never! But it makes me too sorry."

He looked up at her with sudden brightness. He saw her white face smiling down upon him, her soft gray-blue eyes clouded with their deep compassion. Her lips were very tender.

He smiled with a trace of his old insinuating daring, looking boyish again. "You have an English proverb—something from your Shakespeare. How does it go in English? That pity is akin to love!"

Her eyes turned from him to sweep the long narrow room, animated to-day with many visitors. "I love every one of you!" she declared.

"Will you regard me for a moment?"

His eyes were serious now, filled with a bright, warm light. His thin white face was flushed. "Once I was very stupid," he said abruptly. "I—I did not sufficiently respect the canons of your amazing country. But that is forgiven, is it not?"

"Oh, long ago—forgiven and forgotten." Sincerity rang in her quick words. It was of no moment to her now that he had ever misjudged or wounded her. It seemed very trivial and far away.

She thought that she would tell him of Olga and her life now, but he went on hurryingly, "But I have not forgotten! I was insolent! . . . And all the time. . . . It seems that I was indeed searching for my future countess. . . . If—if you would do me so much honor? If this"—he indicated that poor stump—"if this does not repel you?"

"Oh, Etienne!" There was keen reproach for that thought in her cry. Then she smiled and shook her head at him in the teasing way of the bright Katherine

that he had known. "Now I know that you are convalescent. To propose to the nurse—in America that is a most favorable symptom! I shall put it upon your chart."

But he would be answered. "You evade me—and I am sincere. I love you. I did not mean to speak yet, but my love—it is not of a patience, love, you know." He spoke lightly but his pathetic eyes were searching her face.

What he saw there prepared him for her words. "It can never, never be, my dear."

"Never—that is a long time."

"And for me also."

She could not speak of Jeffrey; she could not tear away the protective silence from that bleeding wound in her life, but the sudden inflection of her voice, the dark dilation of her eyes, struck his sensitive perceptions with meaning and hushed the eager words upon his lips.

He said no more. When she rose to go his left hand caught at hers and carried it to his lips in a gesture that seemed to breathe a sudden comprehension in its farewell.

Nor was the time without other reminders of her youth and its place in others' lives. Next day there came a letter from Dick Conrad, grumbling at her lack of communicativeness and at his weakness in writing her again.

> Somehow I can't picture you [he wrote] going about in a uniform distributing beef tea and pale pink pills. Do you wear a cap? Your mother

says you are just substituting now. Does that mean reading aloud to handsome convalescents?

The jocoseness grated upon her sympathies, so freshly vibrating from the day's demands. Then she smiled. Good old Dick! That was his way of putting things, of hiding his feelings under a display of humor. She read on.

We are all fed up on the war over here and the governor is something fierce about it, let me tell you! No "ma patrie" and "dear old England" here! The Conrads are strong for the Fatherland, believe me! Funny, too, because he's never seen it, and his dad cleared out early, I understand, not caring to drill and preferring to make steel in a community where the man of peace was allowed upon the sidewalk, but I am not mentioning that aloud at all. No, sir, we are fighting for the hearth and home and life and liberty, and every nation on earth has been hating Germany since the fall of Eden and trying to slip hemlock in her beer. . . . It always seemed to me that Germany was getting along very fatly, with her share of good things, and this "place in the sun" looks like a mighty hot place in the future, but these thoughts are not for home consumption, little Dickie not caring for a decrease in the size of his pay checks. Enough is pouring out of the family vaults now for the dogs of war. Query: can you call sausages in the trenches the dogs of war?

However the country is doing something else

besides knit and read the headlines. There are some quite entertaining new steps and you had better come home and learn them. The débutantes have got us all trotting till dawn. Never saw such a set of lively youngsters, always up to the day-ahead-of-to-morrow stuff. If you get this far you might sit down and write an old friend a line, just to say that you haven't eloped with any parlez-vous or vodka gentleman to date. Is the painting all off? Or do you still thirst for fame?

As ever,
DICK.

"And the moral of *that*," murmured Katherine as she laid the letter down, "is that Absence makes the heart grow fonder, and he hasn't quite decided on his débutante yet, and will give his old love another chance."

It did not seem to her quite possible that once she had seriously considered Dick Conrad. With all their background of environment they were as far apart as the poles. What different roads they had traveled! She wondered, letting the dusk gain upon her as she sat there with her thoughts, if she could wish herself never to have taken that steamer, never to have met Jeffrey, never to have lived those awful days.

But she could not wish that time unlived. Her memories were priceless.

Her own grief, that had been so strange at first, had grown an intimate. It seemed natural now for that secret heaviness to lie upon her heart—the wonder was she had ever been different! Now she never looked or

planned one week or month ahead. Everything that was dear was behind her; the present was a desperate effort to lose herself in work.

And though in the busy days she seemed more and more like her old self, though she was gallantly cheerful, quick of smile and speech, she never closed her eyes of nights without remembering those other eyes that would never open again, the strange, cold waxen lids her fingers had touched so unbelievingly. And those cold lips. . . . That still heart that she had felt leap and quiver against her own in their young hour of love. . . . Those were the memories that kept her company in the desolate wakeful hours and dogged even her sleep with dreams.

But when Dick Conrad's letter slipped from her fingers and she sat there musing, she began, for the first time, to face something of the future. What was before her? She could not go on here forever; for one thing her money would not much more than last her year out, and for another there would not always be work for her to do. Her family were anxious for her return. This life must end sometime. And then?

She shivered as she looked at those years ahead.

Her painting, of course—but that was only a small part of life. Since the day of her betrothal she had known how small a part. And some spring of incentive was broken in her. . . .

Definitely she had decided not to tell her family. Since Jeffrey's mother did not know her own mother need not be saddened. Confidence would not help, for

they had not known Jeffrey, had not come with her all this way. . . . It would be easier to go on with life at home if no one knew and no worried eyes were watching her saying, "Now she must not brood," or, "Now she is getting over it." No, she would never tell them. . . . But what was she to do with her life?

Very slowly she folded Dick Conrad's letter and put it away. That way was not possible for her. . . . She had put it behind her long ago when she took the steamer for France. Then Jeffrey had first seen her in Dick's arms. And now Dick was going on, dancing and making love, and Jeffrey was under the trees at Les Buissons. . . .

No, it was not possible for her. . . . Not all the wealth of all those factories, pouring their black smoke into the sky, could alter it. . . . Dick's jocularity touched no response. He wanted her to be gay with, to dance with, to make love to. He did not really need her. . . . Her heart was tenderer to Etienne.

He had played his part in this great struggle which had taken Jeffrey. He, too, had suffered, would suffer as long as he lived. She knew what his work really meant to his secret self; she knew what high dreams he had gloried in behind his mask of nonchalance. He would rather have lost his tongue, his limbs, than that hand. . . .

She would have liked to help him but the tenderness of her heart was not the love he wanted, and to give more was an impossibility, even in thought.

She could give only what she had, not what these wanted of her.

So she thought forlornly, sitting there in the dusk, and presently, forgetting that below-stairs a man was waiting for her to come out to dinner with him, she put out her light and crept into bed, reliving on her pillow the days before the great guns spoke and German *Kultur* had broken upon the world.

## CHAPTER XXXI

SINCE the marble had come she had scarcely seen him. Sometimes he came out to eat, sometimes he sat through a dinner with her, but he sat silent and abstracted, his mind back in that studio, cutting and chiseling. Even a glimpse of his model he had refused her. She must wait for the finished thing, he said, pale as that would be to the thought that was trying to shape its likeness.

The glow of creation was upon him and he toiled like a giant upon his rock, spending his strength furiously, draining his already gaunt and haggard body. His worn appearance was troubling Katherine, and when she found that note under her door, asking to see her, her first thought was that he was ill. She listened and could hear no sound from below, where for so many, many evenings had come the march of his restless steps.

She was late that night, for she had stayed at the hospital at the deathbed of a man who held her for his wife and whispered his dying words into her ears, and she was sick and shaken, for the long months had worn her resistance to the snapping point. December, January, February—day by day each had passed. And so

slowly that battle-line was pressing the invader back from France, so slowly, foot by foot and yard by yard —and so many new faces in those beds—so many hobbling out, hurt and maimed!

To-night she was in the grip of horror. And as she ran down the stairs again, her hat and coat untouched, she dreaded what she might find in that room below.

There was no answer to her first knocking and her fear sprang into clearer form. She remembered that casual revolver. . . . Suppose that he had waited only to finish that work of his——?

Again she struck the door. Now there were sudden steps and the noise of a chair pushed back.

The lock was turned, the door opened, and in the dim hall light she saw him standing there in his sculptor's blouse, his hair disheveled, his face flushed.

"I must have been asleep. . . . I didn't hear you come in, though I'd been listening."

He snapped on the electricity and she stumbled into the room a little weak in the reaction of her tired nerves.

"You're ill," he said sharply, staring at her and blinking his heavy eyes owlishly in the sudden light. "You look like a ghost. Where have you been all this time?"

"At the hospital. A man was dying—he thought I was his wife and he kept clinging to me. Oh, it was too pitiful." Suddenly she put her hands up to her face to hide its quivering, but the long strain had been too much and the big tears welled between her screening fingers. "I didn't mean—to act—like this," she stammered, "but I can't stand any more—I can't—I can't!"

And then she flung back her head with a defiance characteristic of her old challenging gesture. "D-don't m-mind me, please. . . . If they can d-die, I guess that I c-can help. . . . I'll be all right."

He gave her a long look, then walked away with a glance at his great covered marble, standing where last summer the marble for his unfinished "Fountain of Life" had stood, and began puttering with his tools.

"You said you—wanted to see me," she reminded him.

"You're too tired. Another time."

"No. I couldn't sleep. . . . I'd rather hear what it was."

A fire in the room had made it warm and she slipped out of her jacket which weighed upon her, and lifted the hat from her tired head, running her ruffling fingers through the soft, light hair.

"I wish you wouldn't wear black," he told her sharply.

Over her shoulder she cast him a faint smile. "I shan't—any more But you didn't send for me to tell me that? Are you ill?"

"Ill? Why, no. . . . But I—I wanted to show you something. I wanted you to see—the first. But you are tired out now. It can wait."

"Oh, your work! I'm not too tired for that! It would rest me, Rob." For months now she had accepted his curt request to use his first name as he used hers, but she had shortened it to Rob in ever sensitive fear of reminding him of Peggy's "Robert."

"I'm not sure about that," he said frowningly. "It's not very—restful."

But she saw that he was boyishly eager to show her,

and she was touched. He looked as if he had been working for days and nights, snatching sleep when his driving energy would let him; he was unshaven, untidy, tousled. . . . She made up her mind to make him come out for a walk with her next day. He was killing himself—and she had neglected him. But she had thought him happier at work.

"Come over here." He indicated the place. "There. . . . Then shut your eyes. . . . Now."

Excitement stirred in his voice. She shut her eyes, wishing she had more vitality that moment to meet the demand of his impatience for her first impression, then at his permission she opened her eyes again upon the finished work. The thing was like a shock. She did not need to summon strength to feign an interest; it took hold upon her with rude force.

Out from the great block of marble rose the triumphant war figure, conquering, imposing, a Mars of blood with a rhythm of lances, a rank of soldierly forms, of massy cannon in the rock behind him. . . . Under him were the crushed creatures, the half-guessed, shattered figures, the prostrate women, the dead men. He trod on upturned, sightless faces. Beneath one foot, clearly indicated from the rough mass of agony, lay the broken, tender figure of a child.

Katherine looked and looked, and all that was artist and all that was woman in her felt the power of that conception—the brute force of the oncoming aggression, the poignancy of that slaughtered child. . . . A lump came into her throat and her mouth worked.

"The Invader," said MacNare grimly behind her.

A rush of tears blinded her. They were tears for the man himself, for the artist whose individual agony had scourged his genius to this thing. . . . She could not look at him just yet. She continued to face that figure of callous conquest.

And then she turned on him a look shining through her tears. "You've carved it there—for the world to see. Oh, if there are 'sermons in stones'——"

"There are—and in paint and ink, and the world sees and reads and only the small, sentient fraction of it feels and understands. . . . As for the mass—" He made a gesture of despair. "Believe me, I have no illusions as to what you or I can do with ourselves and yet—it is there for us to do. . . . And so we keep on. . . . And the mass that cheer and cry for victories, that feel a glory in seizing territory from weakness, in wider boundaries, and far possessions, that mass comes and shudders and says, 'How terrible—but that is war!' And acquiesces—as the East acquiesced in leprosy—and the Brahmin women in suttee and the Spaniard in the Inquisition. . . . 'How terrible—but how customary! . . . It will always be done!' "

His bitterness broke off. "However—one does what one can. You—you feel it?" He motioned toward the great marble, and there was the eager flash of achievement in his face.

"Too much," said Katherine, her wide eyes on it again, a surge of memories rising within her. "Too much," she echoed under her breath.

Abruptly he snapped off the lights, leaving them in darkness but for the waning firelight and the pale, wide

squares of windows, and began fumbling on a littered table for candles and matches. "That's enough—you don't need any more horrors to-day. But I wanted you to see."

Her eyes followed him wistfully. "You're a great man, Mr. Surly Man. It must be a great feeling to make such thoughts come alive."

He shook his tousled head at the looming white mass. "That's not true to my thought. . . . But I've done enough on it. I can't do more. . . . And now that's done——"

He sat down and picked up a pipe, and she sank into a chair opposite him and surveyed him half whimsically, half worriedly.

"Have you lived on anything but coffee and tobacco?"

"Eh? . . . I don't know—I dare say not. . . . Good old Bonnet is always slipping around with some mess or other—I find them at the door when I don't let her in." He smiled faintly.

"She's a dear."

"Yes, yes—a brave woman."

A pause followed, full of brooding for her. She could not shake off the distress of the day and the culminating shock that his marble had made upon her. She asked "What are you going to do now—with that?"

"Oh, that? Not much now. I'm leaving it with some old artist friends and by and by I want it placed publicly—I'm making a gift of it to France."

"Leaving it—but why?"

He said brusquely, "I'm going away."

"Away? Where?"

Somehow she had thought of him as fixture in his cave-like studio. Quick disquiet edged her gaze on him.

"To the front? Where else?"

"Enlist?"

"Naturally."

"Why—why—" Her voice failed. She sat thinking as swiftly as her tired brain would go. . . . Something in the fixity of the man's air brought the key to those old days when she had wondered at his stoic courage. . . . So he had intended this always. . . . And he had accepted every day because he meant this in the end. . . . But his genius had intervened, had held him for one last message to the world.

She said, her voice shaking unaccountably, "You know that you aren't in condition—you aren't half strong enough. Those trenches——"

"It is not to be a contest of physique," he remarked with his old crispness. Under his dark brows his burning eyes turned sharply on her. "Don't worry. I'm not going to shake out with ague in a trench. I'll get to them before that and when I do—God help them!"

Sudden, savage exultation leaped in his grim face. A shocked impression went through her; she shivered and raised a hand in startled protest. "Don't! It's——"

"Well?"

"It's too terrible," she finished weakly. His smile was sardonic. She knew what he was remembering now. That dead child in the room above. . . . And this was what he meant to do about it—what he had always meant. . . . His clenched hand was tightening till the

knuckles whitened as if he had his strong fingers curling about some enemy's throat—those subtle, sensitive fingers of his which could make clay a living thing and chisel beauty from the bare rock.

She flashed at him, "You mean not to come back!"

"Naturally," he said coolly, "but when I go I'll take a few of them along with me—remember that!"

"It's terrible!" she said again, with gathering spirit. "For you deliberately to plan to die—and die killing——"

"That's soldier's business, isn't it?"

"But it's not your business—you're not a soldier! It's your—revenge—your private score. To go out and sell your life—and your life isn't yours to throw away. You can do more that way," she pointed at the marble, "a hundred times than by——"

"Shall I go out and exhibit that to the Germans?"

"To the rest of the world!"

"I have left it to speak for me."

"And you may never reach them. You may die in a trench."

"Chances of war. . . . But I'll risk it."

"You're not fit. You're worn to a——"

"I'll last my time."

She rose to her feet, shaken with gathering fear. Her words came in a broken rush, "But it's death—it's death! . . . And I couldn't bear—I couldn't bear anything more! . . . You must live, I tell you!"

"*Why?*"

Fixed and brightly dark his haggard eyes held hers in irony.

"For—your future—your works—your friends. What you are planning is suicide."

"Live? For my work? My friends?" He leaned forward, his hands knotted, his face upturned to hers. "Let me tell you. Have you any idea what my life is that you are asking me to go on with? . . . Listen. You remember that I spoke to you once of my marriage. But you have no idea—you have no idea what I went through. I married a beauty. I worshiped beauty. I knew nothing of women. I had been a sort of hermit in my young enthusiasm for work, even here in my student days in Paris. I was full of the most blinded idealisms. In my infatuation with that woman I took for granted that beauty of form meant beauty of feeling—I took every refinement, every sincerity, every delicacy as innate. . . . In six months I was sickened to the core. And I did not know then—I did not even comprehend that it was possible for her to betray me. That came later."

He waited a moment, his eyes unwavering upon the girl's shocked face. "You thought there was another man, perhaps? . . . There were half a dozen. Now perhaps you can imagine. . . . But Peg was mine, and when I saw the child would not keep her clean I divorced her. The last man married her. He knew of no former rivals—perhaps he has kept himself from later ones. They prosper, I believe. . . . You need not flinch—it means nothing to me, nothing, except bitterness for my folly, for the utter waste."

His head dropped lower, his black brows drew together as if he were contemplating the ghost of those

old years. Katherine stood motionless, her hand upon the back of her chair, her eyes on his dark head.

He resumed, "You can imagine that after that I did not care for women! No, nor for anyone much. . . . There were some few men here, but I did not care to see them often. . . . Peg and I got along very well. I—I adored the little thing. . . . I used to take her into my bed nights, to feel her little human warmth clinging to me. . . . I could do everything for her. . . . When she grew older of course—I had always that difficulty ahead, but I would manage. . . . But a child cannot be a man's life. Perhaps it can a woman's—I do not know."

He raised his head suddenly and flung her a questioning glance, then his head dropped. "I used to feel starved—and hungry—hungry. I did not know for what. But I went out of my way to avoid a pretty girl. And then you came. . . . And from the first I dreaded you. You were another to avoid. . . . But that night that you saved Peg—I had to go to you—and afterwards you were so gay and so friendly I could not keep away—and then——"

He gave a queer little sound that was like a sick man's groan. "What a blind fool I was! You do not know what I hoped! After Les Buissons—I stayed away till I could face you like a man."

"Oh, I am sorry——"

He brushed away her little whispering cry as if it teased him.

"You need not be—I am not—not now. But I want you to understand. I want you to know what my love





for you meant—hopeless as it was. I gave you everything, everything that I was or could be. I made myself your friend. . . . You went to Les Buissons, and that bomb fell. It destroyed the only thing in the world that was my own. I went mad that night. I go mad when I think of it now. . . . At the last I remember standing with my gun at my forehead—then I thought of you. I wanted to wait to hear that you were safe. After that I would—not kill myself, but sell my life—sell it dearly. But it was long waiting. At last I heard your poor limping steps on the stairs."

His tone involuntarily softened, and he paused, as if thinking of that night. She was thinking of it too, of his silent tenderness, of the kind hand to which she had clung in her whispered outpourings. . . .

In a low voice he said, "I forgot myself in my pity for you. You do not know how gladly I would have died—have died in torture—to give you back your heart's desire. . . . And yet I was almost happy that I could take care of you. It was bitter to take you to London, to his mother. I—I knew that you would feed all your youth to her, if you could, and I wanted you to begin again—to go on—not back. . . . That was why I was not sorry that you did not tell her and I took you to the Cotswolds, away from the sights of war. . . . It is always good to feel the earth again underfoot and the free heavens above. One gets to know oneself."

"Oh, you were good, you were so good!" she cried in a rush of memory.

"Good? My dear, I was adoring you. I was utterly

happy. . . . We seemed alone in the world. But I was not a fool of hope. I had no dreams. I lived in the present. . . . Then you found yourself, and found yourself strong to go on. We came back, and I had one thing more to do. . . . Now that is done. . . . And in all my life there is not one thing to hold me. I have finished. . . . And I tell you all this that you may understand completely and spare yourself any pity of compassion for the rest."

"Not—one—thing?" she said slowly.

He looked very steadily at her and in his eyes she saw the man's long acquaintance with denial. She saw there, too, the softening tenderness for her that was like the look in those other eyes. . . . She flinched at the stab of memory and cried a little wildly, "But you mustn't go, you mustn't! Think how I should feel, should wait for word of you! Oh, it would be too cruel! And if anything happened—as you mean it to happen——"

"I tell you you are not to be sorry! What should I go on for?" His words were curt, his tone hard. "Do not think," he added, quickly, "that I've told you this to hurt you or to beg of you! I am not such a fool! . . . I beg your pardon, my dear," he added, a little huskily, "but you—you mustn't expect me—to go on—forever. I—really think I—can be spared—better than anyone else I know."

His head dropped forward on his hands; his big shoulders, hunched and sagging, had the look in the dusk of some crouched and wounded thing.

She took a quick step toward him, one trembling hand





outstretched as if she would touch him, her lips trying to form some words of meaning. But she could not speak, so much now hung upon each word. Pity was hot in her, urging her to fling herself at his side, to comfort, to murmur kind things. . . . But of what use was such weak kindness? A sop to her feelings—a drain upon his! . . . Always she had taken from him, taken, taken, unwittingly hurting and tantalizing, blind utterly to his deep and secret hungers. . . .

But what now could she give him?

Something cold seemed to pass through her very heart. Her eyes, dark and dilated with dread, stared over his bowed head, seeing their old vision of Jeffrey, erect and soldierly, that smile in his blue eyes. . . . She could feel his dead face against her breast. She was his. How could she tear herself from those memories, even in the urge of divinest pity for another?

In that moment of intense luminous perception the possibilities of life flashed before her. . . . She had begun to know herself; in the very agony of her suffering had been revealed her own poignant capacities for life. From this very passion for life, this longing for the height and depth of human experience, had sprung the bitterest of her pangs of denial. . . . The world before her would be one war of cross-purposes. Would she grow disheartened and tired of her lonely ways? Would she yield to some lesser impulse——

In all her life there did not seem to her anything so worthy the doing as to help—to heal. To this the war had brought her. And there was no one so needing her healing as this solitary man before her, whom life had

hurt so cruelly. But could she do it? Could she go to him?

To-night, perhaps, it would not be hard, with this surge of compassion strong in her, but to-morrow—and all the morrows? He knew her sorrow but where she had drawn comfort from him before, now she must hide the need of it. . . . She must give much—or her compassion would be useless. There must be silence and courage. . . . In all the world, perhaps, there was no one to whom she could come so close to loving—but it was not a bridal gladness that filled her brooding eyes and touched her tender heart. . . .

These thoughts streamed through her as one thought, and she lived the years in the moments in which she stood motionless, her arm half raised, her lips parted over the words that did not come.

As if he had heard he raised his head suddenly and saw her there, poised in the firelight, emotion brimming her eyes, quivering her lips. . . . A flicker of pain twisted across his set face. He knew a sudden savage impulse to jump up, and crush her to him, to feel her soft weight in his arms, her face against his lips. It seemed to him that every frustration that his life had known was in the denial of that wild longing.

Unsteadily, he smiled and shook his head at her. "Not your pity, my dear—not your pity. It's no use. I want —so much more than you can ever give."

As if that refusal were the spring that could stir her she flashed across the firelight to the shadows at his side and knelt beside him, her hands clasping his.

"You don't know—how much I want to give. How

much there is to give," she whispered chokingly. "Of all people in the world I—I could begin again with you."

She felt a heavy hand, like a vise upon her shoulders. She heard the sharply indrawn breath stir the heavy chest. "Do you—do you know—what you are—meaning?"

"I do—indeed I do! I want to make up to you—for all that life has done. I want you to—to make up to me. . . . I couldn't lose you now—I couldn't let you go. No more battles for us, no more blood! We've borne—enough of hurts. There are other ways of helping—for us both. But don't go out to fight—with that hate in your heart! Not—not yet—not till they need you! We'll help, we'll spend our lives in helping, . . . but let it be now for the little children, the homeless ones—for Peggy's sake. . . . Oh, you'll stay? You'll stay with me?"

The man's hand on her shoulder trembled. His heart was beating as if it would break. Incredulous of happiness, his dark eyes, so wistful, so hungry, searched her upturned face.

"With—you?" he said huskily, and then with a little broken sound that was half a sob he bent and drew her close to him, her face against his breast, his cheek on her bright hair.



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